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**Editorial**

**(En)countering (Un)certainty:**

Shifting Orientations through Imagination and Disruption

**Cala Coats**

Arizona State University

**Manisha Sharma**

University of North Texas

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The essays in Issue 41 speak to the complex intersections of personal, social, and institutional uncertainty. A range of humanist, relational, posthuman, more-than-human, speculative, emergent, historical, critical, and reflective orientations, modes, and dispositions illuminate the onto-epistemological de/re-centering occurring across the landscapes of culture, education, research, academia, art, and the everyday. Authors call attention to art’s ability to imagine multiple worlds, inviting divergent perspectives, frames, and lenses to question established policies and practices through a range of critical, creative, and participatory forms and methodologies.

The call for submissions for this, Volume 41 of JSTAE, went out during the summer of 2020 after the spring semester had turned online overnight to allow for social distancing, amidst COVID-19 lock-downs and months of Black Lives Matter protests globally, in response to the killing of George Floyd among other civil rights atrocities, land rights violations such as those at Standing Rock, a polarizing upcoming presidential election in the United States, and increasing divides amongst left and right wing political views in the face of rising nationalist rhetoric favoring hegemonic supremacist traditions across the world. The literal and metaphorical distance from established roles and relationships between individuals and institutions highlighted the fragility and porous boundaries of institutional structures that previously seemed immovable, and the gaps became sites of potential in which to examine habitual and normalized power relations and pose alternative modes of practice.

The lack of a predetermined theme allowed for emergent critical intersections between disability and empathy, diagnosis and self-witnessing, racial, ethnic, and gendered minoritizing and erasure, anthropocentric destruction, and ahuman potential that may not have emerged otherwise. Empathy is addressed repeatedly in these conversations from perspectives of understanding and collective care, and also critiqued as a passively ineffective stance. The blinding, alienating, and isolating effects of ableism emerge in a number of ways. As many articles argue for political action and the transformation of art education’s curriculum, we can consider what is possible when we not only ask who but what is able to speak.

Together, these pieces demonstrate how art educators are shifting our lenses and reorienting our ontological and epistemological frameworks through intersections of theory and practice with questions of rhetoric and action, positionality, visibility, and affect in formal and informal pedagogical sites by unsettling concepts of. Authors ask: Who is visible in our work and how are they viewed? Who can speak, self-identify, diagnose, choose, and how does art education enable/disable this agency?

Jason Wallin uses a graphic narrative to investigate the cannibalistic nature of academia with an imaginatively theoretical engagement with the Anthropocenic and post-Anthropocene. The piece envisions how nonhuman life may invade/reclaim a world dictated by our deeply human conditions. This uncanny visualization becomes an unsettling mirror on the more-than-human viral effects of cultural norms in academic life. It invites us to step outside of a human-centered lens to critically contemplate the logic of this colonial and capitalist system, its viral potential to consume us completely, and our complicity in the proliferation of this phenomenon. The visual essay is particularly compelling at a time when we all are still feeling
the impacts of a global virus and trying to work through it in an illusion of normalcy. 

Tim Garth employs autoethnography and photovoice to document the impact of living with physically and emotionally debilitating conditions and its attendant experiences of giving and receiving care. Documenting one day of cancer treatment, he illuminates a process that is deeply familiar to those in cancer treatment and their support groups. The images, showing him almost exclusively alone, trace the paradox of individual isolation of cancer treatment, surrounded by others who share the same diagnosis. He describes the nuances of forging connections and building relationships that are healing for the involved members of communities of care, and the need for sharing individual stories that are simultaneously individual and collective. This essay carries an eerie timeliness, as COVID-19 restructured everyday lives across the globe to become intentionally isolated. Garth’s piece reminds us that the effects of disease, illness, and isolation existed prior to and simultaneously with the new worlds created from the pandemic. While the deeply humanist themes of empathy and community drive Garth’s piece, it also resonates with Wallin’s ahuman ontological proposition, inviting questions of a virus-centered world and the risks of ignoring the nature of relationships between social and environmental viruses and their inherently isolating impacts.

G. L. Greer examines the limitations of empathy, moving readers to think about the relationship between empathetic engagement and ways in which disability is treated as a less-than-human existence. Greer opens with an evocative set of graphic images that illuminate challenges of being indiscernible and alien to the institutional medical community, with whom patients might be assumed to have consent in desired modes and outcomes of care. They reflect on the multiple daily exchanges in rhetoric, policy, and administrations that feign empathy and care, while superficially or overtly dismissing the actual effects of disability in an able-centric society. They question the potential for self-preservation and sustainable engaged work, while grappling with theoretical and practical nuances of trauma and empathy read through disability studies in art, specifically speaking to problematics of ableism.

Taking a different perspective on disability and representation, Kelly Gross examines the intersections of disability studies, inclusion, and special education in PreK-12 art and design education, by surveying teachers to study how these concepts transfer into curricular decisions, in theory and practice. As part of her analysis, Gross raises the question of how art teachers determine when and how artists’ work is influenced by “disability” and when the presentation of work in this way through a lens of relevance, vis-à-vis a normativatized choice. Gross’s lens on disability shifts to the classroom curriculum, which is both an institutional and individual practice, where teachers make choices that often have empathic intentions but are rooted in a limited base of knowledge. This lens on disability provides a different frame on the individual realities explored in Greer’s uncanny representation of a student seeking medical services and their struggle with broad misconceptions, as well as with Garth’s call to better understand the hope and potential for building empathy and community through artistic documentation and inquiry.

Activating survey data differently to question educators’ choices for their curriculum, Amber Ward explores the process of developing the
exhibition, *Sweep It Under the Rug*. This project aimed to unsettle gender roles, activating engagement with educational responsibility regarding gendered expressions of social experience. The socially engaged process visualized data from a survey on roles and expectations on gender expression administered to participants and installation contributors. Ward uses Barad’s theory of intra-action to examine how emergent intra-active art provokes feeling, thinking, and doing toward a more response-able future. Data visualization as art practice expanded the potential of surveys from a representational instrument to an artistic and collective medium, considering what else is possible when a community’s perspectives on gender roles develop together.

Like Garth, Gross, and Ward, *Sions and Wolfgang* question roles and representation in art education, examining the impact of arts education in de-centering normative social perspectives. Where Garth, Gross, and Ward apply concepts in disability studies and post-humanity, *Sions and Wolfgang* utilize Critical Race Theory to frame the pedagogical possibilities of examining the role of and resistance to whiteness as a default lens to construct socio-cultural histories, even as they center multiculturalism as a curricular imperative. They provide a literature review spanning shifts from multicultural arguments to Critical Race Theory in education and art education, drawing attention to how approaching multicultural art education through the lens of a white gaze can impact BIPOC students. The piece bridges theory and practice, providing examples of strategies for what they identify as decolonizing art education curriculum and pedagogy.

**Albert Stabler** also tackles the impacts of whiteness in contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline in the US. Similarly questioning the gap between rhetoric and reality, he shares his experiences as an art educator working in K-12 schools and an adult prison using Critical Race Theory. Stabler unpacks the inherent violence to BIPOC students, centering white experiences and narratives in our institutional systems. In doing so, he draws attention to the risks of perpetuating a colonizing relationship between standardized curricula built around whiteness, and the distorted effects of its punitive nature on BIPOC students. Stabler, like Greer, addresses the limitation of an empathetic art education, warning against what he calls a falsely compassionate rhetoric, where corrective policies applied at superficial levels can do more harm than good if the white gaze through which they are constructed and applied goes unacknowledged. Here again is a reminder that relational thinking is vital in social justice art education; that a theory applied by itself, without considering its relationality with the communities involved can be harmful, in that it helps maintain the status quo while giving the illusion of change-making. Similar to Gross and Ward, Stabler reflects on data in the form of community discourse, this time from troubling commentary on a Facebook thread. This again highlights the expanding forms of data and research instruments that shape, inform, and reflect our perceptions.

**Kathryn Fuller** also decentralizes whiteness in her essay, by offering a curricular example to revisit social and civil histories through methodological implementation of postcolonial theory, in the form of arts based critical counter-narratives in an effort to include subjugated histories. She explores the history of ledger art, in the 19th century, where US Union troops traded accounting books with Plains Coats, C. & Sharma, M. / (En)countering (Un)certainty
Indians, and considers how this practice can be introduced historically and practiced today as aesthetic resistance. Fuller offers the study of ledger art as examples of decolonizing strategies that can be used in art education and research in the discipline, as applied to hermeneutics and visual literacy in the service of civil discourse.

Similar to Ward and Fuller, Clark Goldsberry offers provocative examples of the use of text in order to revise our viewpoints and deviate from normativized dominant narratives. Goldsberry’s prompts may be seen to offer potentially posthuman or more-than-human perspectives, but they clearly underline the impact of text and language as data in discourse, be it in its linguistic or visual particularity.

This issue illuminates an exciting landscape of art education practices and orientations, as we have encountered uncertainty in every area of life. The essays within this issue are diagnostic journeys to and from the perceived centers and peripheries of our worlds. They articulate the risks of ignoring invisible isolations within existing and emerging communities, and reveal the risks of facing them head on in a world where no consent appears to be present on what the expectations for the future may be. Together, these critical, imaginative, experimental, participatory, and playful forms of writing and thinking emerged as provocations about worlds that are overlooked and yet-to-come.
Revenge of the Lawn

Jason J. Wallin
University of Alberta

The aim of this graphic short-form story is two-fold. First, it aims to operationalize an experimental mode of ‘philo-fiction’ (philosophy fiction) on behalf of speculating on an imperceptible world that has today manifest in the forms of climatological change and global pandemic. Second, the submission aims to articulate an image of thinking from the side of the non-human and in which ‘standard’ narrative focus on the actions of protagonists is superseded by alien life.

Keywords: Posthumanism, philo-fiction, speculative fiction, graphic short-form, new materialisms, relationally
CASE FILE 011-45C
REPORTING OFFICER: DET. J.J. WALLIN

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT BEGINS:

"I KNEW [REDACTED] WELL, WE CAME THROUGH GRAD SCHOOL TOGETHER..."  "MAKES WHAT HAPPENED ALL THE MORE DISTURBING..."
"I MEAN, WHEN HE GOT THAT TENURE TRACK APPOINTMENT AT UMU, I WAS HAPPY AND YEAH, ENVIOUS…"

"IT'S WHAT WE ALL WANTED - AT LEAST I DID…"

"HE WAS A BIG DEAL BACK THEN"
"THE YEAR AFTER [REDACTED] LEFT FOR UMFL, I ACCEPTED A POSITION AT UC EAST..."

"[REDACTED] WAS AT EVERY CONFERENCE THOSE DAYS AND WHEN HE WASN'T DOING THAT CIRCUIT..."

"...HE WAS BUSY WITH SPEAKING INVITATIONS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY"
"I SAW HIM DELIVER A KEYNOTE AT MSDA - HE WAS DRAWING A BIG AUDIENCE, PEOPLE SEEMED TO LIKE HIS STUFF..."

"...I THOUGHT IT WAS FADDISH AND PUERILE"

"HE WROTE A BUNCH OF ESSAYS DURING THAT TIME ON NON-HUMAN THINKING..."

"...IT WAS JUST BAD SCI-FI, LET'S FACE IT..."
"He was popular for a time, but you know, fads come and go..."

"...When the neo-humanist manifesto dropped on 'Tweeter', well, people started following that instead..."
"...we didn't really talk much by that point, but I heard from people that it was a hard time for him. I heard that he even got rejected from the IOCS journal of research ..."

"...I have to admit that I felt a sense of schadenfreude."
"A while after his [long pause] fated talk at the Society for Post-Qualitative Inquiry conference..."

"...a mutual friend who works at the uni’s epidemiology lab wrote me to say that what happened was, well... in his words..."

"Weird as fuck"
APPARENTLY, THE AUTOPSY NAMED ‘ORGAN FAILURE BY FUNGAL PARASITE’ AS AN OFFICIAL CAUSE OF DEATH..."

"...THAT DOESN’T SEEM RIGHT, DOES IT?"

Wallin, J.J. / Revenge of the Lawn

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education / Volume 41 (2021)
"...A BIT BEFORE HIS LAST LECTURE, HE MADE A SERIES OF POSTS ON IG ABOUT THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF 'THINGS'..."

"...AND HAD SOME QUASI-THEORY BREWING ABOUT HOW WE ARE 'INTERPRETED BY STUFF'..."
"...LIKE LITERALLY ‘READ BY THINGS’ [LAUGHS]"
"I heard from one of the quarantined society delegates..."

"That she was treated with some kind of 'anti-fungal aerosol'..."
"...I GUESS WHATEVER ENDED UP 'READING' HIM... TO PUT IT IN HIS WORDS..."
"...WASN'T RESIGNED TO THE HUMAN DRAMA..."
Memorandum

From: Commanding Officer
Risk Management Office

To: Det. Wallin
Investigative Services Detail

Date: Jan. 20, 2020

Subject:

References


Wark, M. (2014). There is Another World and it is This One. Retrieved from [http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/01/there-is-another-world-and-it-is-this-one/#U_zN4EuE6Ml](http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/01/there-is-another-world-and-it-is-this-one/) on January 20, 2014.
Isolation and Empathy: Documenting Cancer Culture

Timothy B. Garth
University of Nebraska at Kearney

In this article, the author provides insight to a culture of cancer by describing a single day of chemotherapy treatment. The author and his caregiver document the process through photography. Wrapped in the context of a global pandemic, the author draws connections between life in cancer culture and broader cultural modifications created by COVID-19. Through this manuscript, the author shares a personal narrative with the hope of building empathy and community.

Keywords: cancer, photovoice, autoethnography

As education adapts to a post-COVID-19 world, photovoice and authoethnographic methods create flexible avenues for introspection and artistic meaning making.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my spouse Michelle for her photography work as part of this project in addition to all the selfless service to our family, our son Oliver for making every day worth living, our extended family and friends, the oncology and nursing teams for their care, and to all survivors—and their support networks—on the cancer culture journey.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Timothy B. Garth, University of Nebraska at Kearney, gartht@unk.edu
Cancer impacts all of us. Nearly two out of five people will experience a cancer diagnosis during their lifetime (National Cancer Institute, 2020). As an art educator with cancer, I utilize photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1994; 1997) and autoethnographic (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2011) methods to document and describe an aspect of my cancer culture: one day of chemotherapy infusion. Like other art educators who share narratives about experiences in cancer culture (Barrett et al., 2008), I anticipate that this “use of imagery helps...to confront and communicate the impact of cancer on our lives and on the lives of others” (p. 4). By sharing my story in the context of a global pandemic, I hope this photo essay fosters empathy and support for anyone who is isolated from family and friends because of their disease or medical needs.

In this project, my caregiver and I documented one day of chemotherapy infusion through photography. This cycle of my treatment involved seven hours at facilities, followed by another 46 hours of ‘take-home’ chemo via a mechanical pump. When creating these images, I received my 26th treatment, totaling more than 1300 hours of infusion over the course of a year. During this process, we became accustomed to a rhythm of procedures and the objects inherent in cancer treatment. However, each cycle presented new opportunities to live my cancer culture.

**Cancer Culture**

Living with cancer can make me feel like I am participating in a double existence. In the relatively normal aspects of my life, I spend time working at school and playing at home. In my cancer life, there are frequent doctor visits, scans, and treatment procedures. Over time, my family and I adapt to a culture of cancer. My use of the term cancer culture is intended to refer to both the global culture of cancer survivorship, care giving, and support communities along with the microculture of an individual’s experience and patients at their local medical facility. Therefore, I use cancer culture to connect broad similarities for what it can be like to experience any cancer diagnosis, while also recognizing that all journeys are unique and varied by factors such as an individual’s type and stage of cancer; access to health care, age, and family history. In this article, I share my cancer cultures by describing what a day of chemotherapy treatment is like for me.

**One Day of Chemotherapy**

It is hard to describe the sensation of having cancer. Physically, I feel well—most of the time— but notice quicker fatigue, physical weakness, cognitive delays, and heightened emotions. I am lucky to have most of my hair; a consistent weight, and the ability to continue working. Outwardly, I do not look like what people expect to see from someone with cancer: I feel lucky to be as ‘healthy’ as I am.

At treatment, I regularly encounter people whose diseases appear more advanced than mine; their bodies seem ravaged by cancers. There is a shock to seeing people that I perceive as vulnerable and frail. What might other patients think when they see me? Then, I remember there are eight tumors lurking within me. I wonder if I may look that way soon.

In the public areas and waiting rooms of medical facilities, it is hard not to focus on my own health and mortality. Traversing these spaces, I do not pay much attention to people dressed in scrubs or white jackets. Rather, I want to bond with the people wearing medical wristbands, as we share a similar detour on our life journeys. Often, our eyes meet. We share an acknowledgment of membership in the same sorry fraternity. I try to smile and give them a
supportive nod. I regret that we rarely converse. It is not easy to get out of my own head when facing such consequential matters. In these passing moments, I attempt to connect with others, but our situations are inherently unique and can feel solitary to me. However, I find comfort in being part of a community of people who are also navigating life with cancer.

In my experience as a cancer patient, I control few things and there are many unknowns. However, the repetition of a treatment cycle provides some stability; I can anticipate how the day will go. For me, treatment days consist of two phases: screening and infusion.

**Screening**

We arrive at the oncologist’s office around 8:00 AM. Each cycle begins with a blood draw for laboratory work to see if my body can tolerate the medicine (see Figure 1). A three-quarters inch needle pierces my chest to access a catheter port used for infusion. It stings, even with a numbing product on my skin. A nurse collects three vials of blood for a complete blood count and comprehensive metabolic panel. These tests measure how my liver and immune systems are functioning. For me, unsatisfactory results delay treatment for at least a week. A hold back from treatment is when a patient is unable to receive medicine because their medical team deems that they are physically unable to tolerate the toll of treatment on their body. Benchmarks for treatment in my plan include the results of the blood draw and severity of side effects. Being held back is emotionally devastating for me because it means that my body is defenseless to the cancer until I can recuperate. I experienced this twice.

After the blood draw, we move to an exam room and wait for the lab results. We meet with our oncologist or their nurses for a consultation, physical exam, and the opportunity to discuss side effect management (see Figure 2). If the consolation and lab results are acceptable, we proceed to a different facility to receive chemotherapy.

**Infusion**

Upon arrival at the infusion center, we sit in a waiting room surrounded by other cancer patients and their caretakers. Some are chatty; most are not. Nearly everyone in this space appears to be at least 25 years older than me. Cancer and treatment have ways of aging a person. Then, the staff move us to an infusion room where we prepare for treatment (see Figure 3).

The rooms are nice for privacy but can feel solitary. We wait for a pharmacist to prepare the chemotherapy. Guests help pass the time (see Figure 4). I try to eat lunch while still having an appetite. I receive several bags of chemotherapy and a few more bags of medicines that curb side effects of the toxins (see Figure 5). There are frequent trips to the bathroom to expel the fluids being pushed into my system.

Nurses and caregivers monitor me constantly, yet I cannot help but feel isolated by my circumstance. The physical toll of the medicines mount throughout the day (see Figure 6). I have hot flashes and chills. My eyes are sensitive to light. Loud noises hurt my head. It feels like my abdomen is rotting.

At the end of infusion, the nurse attaches a mechanical chemotherapy pump to my port (see Figure 7). Every 30 seconds, it makes a low humming sound while injecting me with more chemo. The device is about the size of a cassette player. I wear it around my waist for the next two days. By late afternoon, I am tired, weak, and ready to go home (see Figure 8). My spouse, son, and I exit the facility, saying ‘goodbye’ to...
everyone we encounter. Fresh air fills my lungs and caresses my skin. The sun’s warmth helps me feel alive and grateful to see another day.

**Cancer + COVID-19**

We created the photographs in this project in February 2020. Since that time, life around the globe dramatically changed. Through my reflexive thinking about the project, I could not help but to consider connections between my cancer culture and the broader world during a pandemic.

In these times, we may all feel sequestered by concerns for health and safety. There are modifications to the ways some go about daily activities and engage with the world. I have become more conscious of physical spaces and interpersonal exchanges. A heightened awareness of what and how I touch objects alters my interactions with the environment. Disruptions to the norm seem to affect all areas of my life. I am encountering the world in new and occasionally uncomfortable ways because of cancer and compounded by COVID-19.

Might these contexts have implications for art education? At schools, teachers and students face unprecedented challenges in managing health, safety, and instructional methods. Physical distancing, personal protective equipment, and remote learning environments modify the typically collaborative and social nature of art classrooms. Yet, the therapeutic potential of art making and empowering qualities of storytelling provide pathways to investigate our personal cultures, connect with others, and fight feelings of isolation by sharing our experience. As education adapts to a post-COVID-19 world, photovoice and autoethnographic methods create flexible avenues for introspection and artistic meaning making. I hope that in the uncertain times of a global pandemic, we facilitate the use of artistic practices and narratives to communicate our experiences and combat isolation by building empathy to connect with others.

**Conclusion**

Cancer is an important—albeit challenging—topic to discuss. For individuals with my cancer diagnosis, approximately 14% survive beyond five years (National Cancer Institute, n.d.). A statistic that is difficult to face. Personally, this project helps me process feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and impermanence. Utilizing narrative to share my experiences with cancer provides a catharsis for the challenging realities of treatment (Barrett, 2011). By documenting a single day of treatment, I would like to help broach uncomfortable conversations, provide insight into my cancer culture, and transcend finite time by sharing my story. Beyond the images and narrative, I hope to confront feelings of isolation for others and inspire opportunities for connection and healing.

If you are affected by cancer or want to learn more visit the National Cancer Institute’s website (www.cancer.gov) or contact the author at gartht@unk.edu to have a conversation and share your story. Through an informed community we can build awareness and facilitate empathy.
Figure 1 0844 (Blood Draw)

Figure 2 0906 (Physical Check)
Figure 5
1215 (Toxic Medicine)

Figure 6
1322 (Tiring)

Garth, T. / Documenting cancer culture

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Figure 7
1444 (Check-out)

Figure 8
1456 (Homecoming)
References


Healing work—like teaching work—may be facilitated by empathy, however systemic organization—not personal emotional capacities—must be the engine of care and justice work.

Appointment Notes /
On Unwanted Help and the Misuse of Empathy

G.H. Greer
Concordia University, Montreal, Q.C, Canada

The pandemic has shed light on a number of injustices. In this context, I revisit a comic I wrote to sort through an experience of ableism in academia. I encourage readers to think deeply about what teachers mean when we offer help as members of a caring profession, and consider some ways that the misuse of empathy can impede impactful help. I end with a call for systemic organization and resources to support workers in caring professions.

Keywords: ableism, COVID, empathy, help, disability arts

Correspondence to this article should be addressed to G.H. Greer also known as Lucky Howard at glucky/howard@gmail.com
Accessible image description:
The title page is a close-up image of a pad of paper titled “Appointment Notes”
Panel 1: A person with a large fish on their head stands in front of a reception desk. The person behind the desk is looking down at a computer.

Dialogue:

Receptionist: NUMBER SIXTY ONE!
Fish Head: Yep, that’s me.
R: HEALTH CARD!!
FH: Here you go.

Panel 2: Fish Head leans forward and the crowded doctor’s waiting room is visible behind them.

Dialogue:

FH: Um, actually I’d rather not say.
R: SUIT YOURSELF HAVE A SEAT!
Accessible image description:
Fish Head is seated with the other people in the waiting room. A child with a large snail on their head stares at Fish Head and Fish Head smiles back. The snail extends antennas toward Fish Head.

Dialogue:

**Child’s caretaker:** It’s rude to stare, Ruthie.

**FH:** That’s OK.
**Accessible image description:**

In the doctor’s office, the doctor is at a desk typing with a large computer screen between the doctor and Fish Head. Fish Head is smiling.

**Dialogue:**

**Doctor:** I’m Doctor Nitchie. What seems to be the problem today?

**FH:** Actually, it’s a bit embarrassing. I have—

**D:** A fish, yes I see.

**FH:** No actually it’s not about—

**D:** Well a wide variety of conditions can arise from—

**FH:** but I’m pretty sure—
Dialogue:

D: I see. And I'm sure you googled it. I wish you people would—well never mind. Why don't you tell me what *you* think the problem is and then I'll explain my *professional* assessment.
Accessible image description:
The same image as the previous one, with doctor sitting across from Fish Head with a desk and computer screen between. Instead of speech bubbles there is empty space overhead between them. The doctor stares at Fish Head. Fish Head looks down and slouches. The fish looks at the doctor angrily.
**Accessible image description:**

*Panel 1*
A narrow panel with just enough room for Fish Head. Fish Head looks down, embarrassed and the fish looks down at Fish Head with concern.

**Dialogue:**

**FH:** Um… I have this rash on my…

*Panel 2*
A wider panel, showing the back of the doctor who faces the computer screen while typing. Fish Head is off panel to the right.

**Dialogue:**

**D:** Yes, yes, that’s hormonal. I’m sure it’s related to your… obvious issue.

**FH:** *Are* you sure? because I just changed laundry soap so…

**D:** That could be a factor, but to get to the root of your sensitivity we should look at removing the fish.
**Accessible image description:**
The page is split into 2 panels, the first is a close up of the fish's face looking concerned and unsure with shake lines around the fish's head. The second panel is a closeup of Fish Head's face looking down with a resigned, unhappy expression.
**Accessible image description:**

Fish Head is visible from behind, walking out a door marked “exit” and scratching their bum. To the right, the doctor is also visible from behind still seated at the desk with a patient file in hand.

Dialogue.

**FH:** No thank you.

**D:** Suit yourself.
Accessible image description:

Panel 1
The doctor is seated at their desk visible from the side, writing.

Panel 2
Close up of what the doctor is writing. On a pad of paper titled “Appointment Notes” the doctor has written “Some people just don’t want help.”
**Accessible image description:**

**Panel 1**
Fish Head is leaving the waiting room. The word “Doctor,” visible through the glass exit door, is written in reverse above a label that says “PUSH.” Fish Head is looking down and has a hand covering their face. The fish looks sad and upset. The fish’s gaze is directed backward into the waiting room.

**Panel 2**
In the waiting room, Ruthie stares across the panel break to where Fish Head is leaving. Ruthie’s care taker is no longer sitting next to them so Ruthie is alone. The snail’s antenna’s flop away from Fish Head.
On Unwanted Help and the Misuse of Empathy

(Content Note: discussion of suicide, death, and systemic injustice.)

I wrote the comic above in the Fall of 2019. My making process was triggered by the sentence “Some people just don’t want help.” A psychologist said that as a guest speaker during a staff meeting. He was meant to be supporting the faculty in my university department through the lost life of a student. This doctor’s manner inferred a peer relationship with the educators in the room. I know from experience that this is frequently not how psychologists speak to their patients. The nuance of this register shift from medical professionals in work contexts, cues me to prepare myself for statements that I may find difficult to hear—things that doctors would never say in front of patients. To that extent I was ready, but this sentence still landed in me like a gut-punch.

The psychologist was addressing a group of professionals: deeply but professionally affected by the tragic but professionally-relevant issue of student suicide. That’s one true story. This comic is a mask for another true story, in which I have shared the struggles with suicidality that claimed the life of that student. It’s been over a decade since I admitted myself to an emergency unit, afraid that I would hurt myself. That experience—and others of navigating the health-care system as a working-class, transgender person with a learning disability—has given me a particular understanding of what a psychologist might mean by the word “help.” I have heard that word used to describe confinement, forced compliance, and coerced medication. In my experience, and within my communities, “help” may be unpleasant, but the consequences of “refusing help” can be worse. Access to needed medications or professional support people may be withdrawn and housing or income security can be threatened. For me the subtext of the sentence “Some people just don’t want help” is a cascade of insinuation and threat that feels a lot like “They got the trouble they asked for;” “Don’t waste your energy on those people;” and “People like that don’t belong here.”

I am writing now in the fall of 2020, in what I assume is the run-up to the second wave of this pandemic. I am recovering from COVID-19, and this morning I have re-read this comic more than a dozen times. It’s soothing me, like humming a familiar tune. The character Fish Head is an alter-ego of mine, and this fictional story is a passage through which I am traveling again to reify and make bearable my recent fears of medical “help.” I share this comic here to express something, for which words do not come to me readily.

The something has told me that while I am sick I need to know the decimal of the degree at which a fever becomes dangerous. I need to distinguish between serious and non-serious symptoms, and of the serious symptoms I need to recognize critical levels of severity. The something is addicted to Google searches. During the timeless,
pandemic-time before I got sick, I applied this same hyper-vigilance to mask-wearing, hand-washing, and social isolation—true story. There is no absolute safety in a pandemic—also true. The something beyond my words, which has compelled my—ultimately ineffective—abundance of caution, is trauma. Hospitals are not, in my experience, places of care.

Without creating undue risk, I have felt an ethical as well as an emotional resistance to pursuing medical intervention for myself lately. Governments have been releasing statements since March, 2020 about the need for “triage” during this pandemic (Hendry, 2020). I am abled passing (I don’t look disabled) but I can hear this dog whistle—this statement that harms a particular group while seeming benign to others. When health care providers prioritize the lives they perceive as most live-able, an inability to imagine disabled joy becomes a justification for undervaluing disabled lives. Triage statements often mean that hospitals are withholding life-saving care from disabled people.

The fatal impacts of hospital triage practices during this pandemic can be seen in the story of Michael Hickson, a 46-year-old father of five, who died because the doctors at St. David’s South Austin Medical Center determined that his life was insufficiently valuable to warrant the use of a ventilator (Shapiro, 2020). Melissa Hickson brought her COVID-afflicted husband Micheal, a disabled Black man, to that hospital for help. As an abled-passing, White person, the same policies used to justify Michael Hickson’s death make more ventilators available to people like me. I am reluctant to consume medical resources under these conditions.

I wonder how abled people, with only abled-passing friends and family, consuming only abled-centric media receive these triage announcements. Did writing these policies inflict on the policy writers the kind of moral injury—or burn out—that could lead them to join the ranks of the disabled? What kind of logics could determine abstract relative values for my life and that of Michael Hickson? In what kind of society are such logics implementable? Critical disabilities scholar, Jay Dolmage (2017) states that, “Ableism renders disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default” (p. 18). To my mind, the logics described above—which value abled lives over the lives of disabled people—are ableist.

In academia, Dolmage (2017) notes that ableism is more often apologized for than meaningfully rectified, and that apologies often enable this lack of rectification. Rather than engaging with disability community as a

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1 I use the word “disabled” here as I would the word “Canadian”. I don’t always specify “Canadian people” because the personhood of Canadians is implied. For readers looking for mandatory affirmations of personhood in relation to disability, I wonder what loophole disability opens for you such that personhood is called into question. See the APA style guide for further discussion of identity-first language https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/disability

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source of expertise on accessibility, institutions parse equity-seekers into individual units and direct us toward gatekeepers like the psychologist mentioned above. This system inevitably fails because the meaningful integration of abled and disabled people—including equitable access to life-saving resources—requires community rather than individual engagement.

Scholar of disability art, Carrie Sandahl (2018) suggests such a collaborative approach for the creation of accessible arts spaces. Claiming the inconveniences of disability as a generative source of transformation, Sandahl calls readers to “go beyond accommodation, which assumes we start with mainstream and flex to include disability. Instead let us start with disability’s unreasonableness and burdensomeness to significantly remodel the mainstream” (p. 94). This approach requires mainstream recognition of disability culture and employs as a starting point unique disability values, practices, and aesthetics.

Disability art, made to be accessible by and for disabled people, is an important component of disability culture. Unlike mainstream art about disability, which often employs disabled people as an object lesson for the benefit of abled people, “disability art does not feel compelled to serve a consciousness-raising lesson” (Sandahl, 2018, p. 86). That is to say that inducing empathy is not the goal. As an individual emotional experience empathy is ill-suited to affect the collective transformation that Sandahl proposes.

**Empathy and Injustice**

The comic above is not an attempt to induce empathy, or to critique a lack of empathy. It is an artifact of self-witnessing, like the work of comic artist Tikva Wolf (2018) in which drawing enables the externalizing and organization of thoughts and feelings. Composing this comic enabled me to articulate the experience of having my reality overwritten by doctors. This articulation emerged from my need to bear that painful staff meeting, in which I felt that the psychologist overwrote important experiences of our student with the sentence “Some people just don’t want help.” I revisit this comic now to help me resist the larger overwriting I see around me during this pandemic. Low-income people are risking their lives for economic survival while media encourages financially comfortable individuals to overwrite those experiences as “essential” and “heroic” from the safety of our homes. Lifesaving care was withheld from Michael Hickson while hospital policy overwrote that injustice as “triage.” To me, this comic is not about the failure of the doctor’s empathy, but the injustice of a system that fails particular groups in predictable ways regardless of the feelings of the individuals involved.

I see empathy as a red herring in discussions of justice. As a teacher empathy has motivated me to act, despite woefully incomplete understandings about the impact of my actions. This was particularly the case while I worked as a White teacher of Indigenous students in the legacy of North Greer, G.H. / Appointment Notes

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American residential schooling. Empathy led me to focus on individual teaching labor, without insight into the systemic injustices of my work context. Further, empathy did not require any recognition of my own complicity in the system that employed me. The burnout I experienced as I attempted to labor myself (and my students) out of systemic injustice eventually led to the hospital admission I mentioned above. Prior to these experiences I viewed empathy as a moral compass. Now I am in deep agreement with professor of Social Justice Education, Megan Boler’s (1997) statement: “I am not convinced that empathy leads to anything close to justice, to any shift in existing power relations” (p. 255).

According to psychologist Paul Bloom (2017), there is a tendency in popular culture to misdefine empathy as a synonym for goodness. The consequence of this misrepresentation may be a misdirection of resources toward expressions of empathy without regard for the impacts of these actions. For example, preceding my burnout I was empathically motivated to teach job skills and “anger management,” rather than to undertake organizational work in coalition with Indigenous community members. Focusing on skill deficits in students rather than the oppressive tendencies of educational institutions compounds injustice by locating systemic problems within marginalized individuals. Empathy did not lead me to support Indigenous language education, or to consider whether my presence contributed to the over-representation of White teachers in schools that predominantly serve students of color.

In more recent employment—working with exceptional and disabled students—I notice that the valorization of empathy as an inherent “good” has the potential to stigmatize a lack of empathy as “bad.” I have had the opportunity to work with students who may be prone to an inability to identify or express emotions and moods through words (Poquérusee et al., 2018). This is a condition that is also familiar to me personally as a symptom of burnout (Augustin et al., 2020). In this context I am reminded that many people are either empathy-impaired, or have alternative modes of empathy-expression. Allistic (or non-autistic) people repeatedly fail to recognize autistic expressions of empathy (Gernsbacher & Yergeau, 2019; Milton, 2012). Short and long-term empathy deficits can result from a variety of causes, from clinical diagnoses to being tired. During the time that my empathy was impaired by compassion fatigue, I can attest that I still understood and was able to act with care toward my students. People can do good work and avoid causing harm while lacking the energy or capacity to intuit or articulate the emotional states of others.

**Towards Justice**

Healing work—like teaching work—may be facilitated by empathy, however systemic organization—not personal emotional capacities—must be the engine of care and justice work. Individuals will sometimes fail to sufficiently perceive the value of life. I want
to be part of a society that enables doctors to save lives anyway. Similarly, I want to be part of a society where students are not tasked with eliciting teacher empathy in order to receive educational support. Triage medical policies that prioritize able-bodied lives are barriers to the development of such societies, as are many current educational policies, which I have explored elsewhere (Greer, 2018).

To achieve justice, people like doctors and teachers—who hold power over others by the nature of our occupations—must be supported to consistently do what our best selves would discern as right. We cannot rely on individual emotional resources like empathy that are often context-dependent and temporary. As the number of COVID-19 deaths increases again, in the wake of my own fears of hospitalization, I wonder if our institutions were ever designed to sustain or support our best selves.

I have heard that the word radical comes from the Latin word for root, and that to be radical means to work for change at the root of the system. I hope that when you read this article the pandemic is over. And I hope that if you recognized injustice during the pandemic or at any other time, you let it radicalize you. If your passion has cooled—because feelings come in waves—I wish for you the community organization required to sustain your work. And if your community has been fragmented by the isolation of this pandemic, I wish for you the art that you need to reify and survive your own experiences until we can be together again.
References


The contrast between art teachers’ sincere intent to be inclusive and inspiring and the problematic narrative that some reinforce illustrates the need for further inclusion of disability arts.

Inclusion and Disability as Curricular Practice

Kelly M. Gross
Northern Illinois University

As policies regarding students with disabilities in education have changed to support inclusive approaches, the field of art education must consider the translation of these concepts to Prek-12 art and design curriculum. This study examines curriculum content regarding the inclusion and representation of disability in United States’ Prek-12 visual art and design classrooms in the state of Illinois. It utilizes a descriptive survey design that involved art and design education teachers throughout the state. These data provide information on the general state of art and design education while also considering the connections between theory and practice. Data from this study indicate that although art teachers include representations of disability as part of their curriculum, there could be further inclusion of disability arts. This article contributes to research examining the intersections of disability studies, inclusion, and special education in Prekindergarten-12 schools.

Keywords: inclusion, disability, K-12 schools, curriculum, art education

Author note: Data collection for this research occurred while the author was employed at Illinois State University. Analysis was completed while the author was employed at Northern Illinois University.

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In 2006, the United Nations passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which required that nation-states “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels” (United Nations, 2006, art. 24: 1). What inclusion means and looks like varies considerably based on local and state policy. As Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) explain, inclusive education approaches can take many forms, including an individual approach to difference, pluralism as social practice, diversity as curricular practice, and critical pedagogies. Researchers in art education have explained that equitable inclusion must move beyond including people with disabilities in classrooms, to also include the perspectives of people with disabilities in art and design education curriculum through art, narratives, and terminology (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). This study examines how inclusivity theories have translated to the inclusion of representations of disability in prekindergarten-12th grade visual arts education curriculum in the state of Illinois.

In the United States, most art teachers do not face as many curricular directives as other subject area teachers (Bolin & Hoskings, 2015). Bolin and Hoskings state, “What is actually taught and communicated about art to learners is frequently a matter of individual educator choice, with little specifically directed regulation from the state, school district, or supporting institution” (p. 40). Therefore, art and design teachers often have the freedom to determine which artists may be studied and what supplementary materials may be used. Art and design educators may often choose the content or concepts associated with their lessons, so even when a district dictates that certain skills should be taught in specific classes, art teachers have the flexibility to infuse curriculum with content based on their choice. Stabler and Lucero (2019) describe that their ability to create a curriculum of their choosing in Chicago Public Schools was because neither was micro-managed by administrators in the way that non-art teachers may be. This freedom allows for art educators to engage in studies of representations of disability and disability aesthetics as a way to develop an understanding of disability as a complex and varied lived experience (Eisenhauer, 2007). Disability aesthetics, as defined by Siebers (2010), moves beyond historical notions of beauty as associated with an ideal form or healthy body and embraces representations that "seem by traditional standards to be broken," enriching and complicating our notions of aesthetics (p. 3).

Research regarding the inclusion of representations of disability in other incorporated media, such as children’s books, has important implications regarding the development of art education curricula (Kraft et al., 2013; Wilkins et al., 2016). In a research study with three third-grade classrooms that focused on introducing children’s literature featuring characters with disabilities, the researchers found that students did not understand that the portrayal of certain behaviors was related to disability. However, when the disability and its connection to specific behaviors were explicit, students were more curious and motivated to learn about the disability (Wilkins et al., 2016). Kraft and Keifer-Boyd (2013) explained that the

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Throughout this paper, both people-first and identity-first language is used. In the United States, most schools use people-first language (Berger, 2017). For this survey, which was based on school settings, people-first language was used. However, within Disability Studies literature, many scholars and disability activists prefer the use of identity-first language. When referring to disability arts and/or specific artists who use identity-first language, then identity-first language is utilized.
representations of disability in media such as films, songs, artwork, literature, and advertising affect and inform our understandings of disability. This leads to implications for art teachers when considering whether they need to identify disabilities when discussing an artist’s work or other visual content. It is essential for art teachers to discuss disability with students because engaging in studies of disability can widen our understandings of human variation and differences (Siebers, 2010).

Surveying Art Teachers in Illinois

This study utilized a descriptive survey design and was part of a more extensive study examining inclusive approaches related to disability, curriculum, and pedagogy in prekindergarten-12th grade visual art and design classrooms. In the United States, prekindergarten starts at age 4. Students typically graduate from grade 12 around the age of 18. However, students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs)² for an identified disability are allowed to attend

² Students with disabilities may qualify for an IEP as determined by the school district. However, some students with disabilities may not qualify, inform the district of their disability, or be un-diagnosed. Students may or may not identify as having a disability/being disabled regardless of having an IEP. Teachers’ knowledge of students with disabilities in their classes is provided through student information systems that identify students as having an IEP.
school through the age of 21 to meet graduation requirements. In the spring of 2020, a digital survey was sent to art teachers in Illinois. The research consisted of a multi-stage process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher first contacted art teachers via email, then art education leaders at school districts to disseminate the surveys, and finally utilized social media tools to recruit local participants.

Many of the full survey questions were modeled after a Council for Exceptional Children Study commissioned study, The State of Special Education Professional Report (Fowler et al., 2019), using the same Likert scale categories. In the first section of the survey, participants were asked a series of demographic questions. In the second section, which is discussed in this article, the questions posed were designed to elicit information regarding the inclusion and representation of artists with disabilities as part of the art curriculum. Pilot testing of the survey occurred using a small sample of art teachers known to the researcher. Questions on the survey include multiple-choice and short answers.

The majority of questions were analyzed using a count method. Three questions were open-ended. One open-ended question asked teachers to identify artists with disabilities they used in the curriculum and was analyzed using counting; another asked the teachers to identify “other” types of visual representations of disabilities they use in their classroom. In a follow-up short-answer prompt, teachers were asked, "Why do or don’t you identify the disability?"

Analysis of this question involved a coding process, first identifying themes in the responses, then cross-checking those themes. One theme required a further, second level of coding to distinguish the responses. This research is limited by several factors, including potential bias by those who elected to participate in the survey and the accuracy of descriptive statistics as dependent upon teacher’s self-reporting.

Survey Participants

Initially, the survey was sent via email to 876 visual art and design teachers and later distributed via social media platforms. The survey received an initial 163 responses, of which twelve were from social media or shared links. The response rate for emails was 17.2%. However, only 153 participants identified as teaching visual art or design to PreK-12th grade students in a school setting in Illinois, therefore n=153.

Descriptive information provided by the respondents provided demographic data. Participants self-identified the location of their school as large urban for 18.5% of respondents, small urban for 11.25%, suburban for 52.98%, and rural for 17.22%. The schools that participants taught in were 87.42% public, 9.27% private, 1.99% selective enrollment public, and 1.32% charter.

There was a fairly even distribution of grade levels taught with a slight skew towards elementary school teachers. However, all grades from Kindergarten to Twelfth had between 48 and 74 teachers who identified as teaching that grade.

Only 13 of the teachers identified as teaching prekindergarten students. The largest group of

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3 An Institutional Review Board approved this survey, and all participants consented prior to participation. IRB-2020-133

4 In a count method, the total number of respondents who selected a specific answer is identified.
respondents identified as teaching 15 or more years (47.01%), while the remainder of
respondents were relatively evenly distributed between 1-3 years, 4-9 years, and 10-14 years.
7.28% of the respondents identified as having a
disability.

**Inclusion in Illinois Classrooms**
Teachers were asked to report on various
questions that illustrated how students with IEPs
received visual arts instruction and what the
make-up of art classes looks like in terms of
students with IEPs. In the United States, ninety-
five percent of students with IEPs are in the
educational environment described as "regular
schools," making up 13.01% of the general
population of students attending public schools
(NCES, 2020).

Researchers have acknowledged that visual
arts education is often one of the primary places
where students with IEPs are placed for an
inclusive setting, which may lead to a higher than
average number of students with IEPs in some
classes (Gerber et al., 2014). Teachers were
initially asked to describe the percentage of
students they teach in visual art and design with
an IEP plan (Figure 1).

In reporting the number of students who
have an IEP plan, 8.9% of teachers reported
0-5%, 17.12% of teachers reported 5-10%,
21.92% of teachers reported 10-15%, 24.66% of
teachers reported 15-20%, 15.75% of teachers
reported 20-30%, 6.85% of teachers reported
30-40% and 4.79% of teachers reported more
than 40%.

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From the responses, 21.92% of teachers identified a percentage range that aligns with the state statistic. In the state of Illinois, 15% of all students have an IEP (IRC, 2021).

However, 7% of students with IEPs are educated in a separate facility. Therefore, the average percentage of students with an IEP in public schools is 13.95%. Over half, 52.05%, of teachers reported that students with IEPs are over-represented in their visual art and design classes.

Follow-up questions to this provided additional insight into variations in class make-up that teachers may experience. 24.83% of teachers reported teaching a class where there is a smaller percentage of students with IEP plans. Teachers most commonly reported that these were high school classes such as advanced art, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes. Additionally, 16.44% of the teachers reported teaching a class where all of the students have an IEP. The data suggest that visual art and design teachers are likely to teach a high number of students with IEPs, advanced level classes in the high school are likely to have a smaller number of students with IEPs, and self-contained classes for students with IEPs in visual arts are consistently being taught.

The next question on the survey was designed to provide data regarding if the inclusion of students with IEPs in visual arts and design classes is extended to the incorporation of representations of disability through media, artwork, and literature. However, the inclusion of representations of disability should not be seen as merely a reflection of the inclusion of students with disabilities. Rather, the inclusion of disability arts, discussion of disability aesthetics, and other disability representations are a means to engage students in a reconceptualization of disability for all students.

When visual art and design educators were asked to consider how often they included artists and designers with disabilities as part of the curriculum, 129 participants responded. The respondents chose Never (17.83%), Some of the time (58.91%), About half the time (16.28%), Most of the time (3.88%), and Always (3.10%) (Figure 2). Teachers identified additional means they utilized to include representations of disability as part of their curriculum. For this question, teachers were allowed to choose as many categories as fit. Out of 145 responses on this question, they identified the following uses of media: Movies (27), Comics or Graphic Novels (26), Literature (12), Children’s Books (50), Media/Advertising (21), and Other (9) (Figure 3). For “Other,” teachers identified Scholastic Art, ART 21, tattoo artists, youtube, and self-made Powerpoints as sources for teaching students about work made by artists and designers with disabilities. Several follow-up questions were asked of teachers to help understand which artists or designers with disabilities they are including, if they identify the artist as disabled to students, and why they were making choices to do so. When teachers were asked, “What are the names of artists or designers with disabilities that you incorporate as part of your curriculum?” (Table 1), they overwhelmingly identified Chuck Close as the most frequently included artist. The artists listed include artists with physical disabilities, vision impairments, ASD, learning disabilities, and mental health disabilities. These artists create(d) in a wide range of media but mainly represent North American and European artists who produced work in the last one hundred and fifty years.
Another 35 artists were also uniquely identified by art teachers as artists or designers with disabilities whom they included as part of their curriculum. Rather than listing artists, three teachers listed “self-taught” and another three listed “unsure”. Five art teachers’ comments suggested this was not something they usually considered. Two of those teachers stated that they had never considered this before, and another two stated that “this is a good idea” and said they had never looked to see if the artists have a disability.

119 teachers responded to the question, “When you incorporate an artist with a disability, do you identify the disability to the students?” Most overwhelmingly said Yes (76.41%), with a smaller percentage who selected Maybe (16.81%) and No (6.72%). In a follow-up short-answer prompt, teachers were asked why they do or do not identify the disability. 105 teachers responded with answers that fell into six main categories identified by keywords or concepts: empathy (n=3), identity (n=7), normalize/differences (n=13), part of the artwork/artists’ stories (n=22), success/perseverance/overcome (n=45), and do not identify (n=12). For those who chose to give reasons why they do not identify an artists’ disability, responses fell into two main categories. First, some teachers clearly stated they did not want the artist defined by disability. Other teachers worried about drawing attention to students with IEPs in their curricula. 

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classrooms, stating: “I don’t want to spotlight students who are mainstreamed.” Teachers who mentioned empathy were concerned with students without disabilities empathizing with people with disabilities. Comments about normalizing and differences included “to make disabilities seem not so different,” “normalize differences,” and “to reduce stigma around certain disabilities.” A larger group of teachers (n=22) explained that they felt disability should be identified as it “can be an important part of how they developed their skills,” “may influence the content,” and it “help(s) the students to understand why the artists creates art or how they create art.” Several teachers who commented in this category pointed out that they only identify the disability if they feel it is relevant to the work.

The forty-five comments in the last category were statements related to the art teachers’ positive attitudes regarding the ability of people with disabilities in visual arts. Comments in this category most commonly featured the words everyone/anyone, success/achievement, perseverance, and overcome. Many comments contained the words everyone/anyone and success/achieve together, including: “anyone can be successful” and “everyone can be an artist, successful people can have a disability.” Some comments seem to suggest that perseverance may be necessary when someone has a disability and that identifying an artist’s disability(s) may demonstrate this effort. Teachers stated phrases such as “shows perseverance” and “grit or perseverance that was needed to not let disability stop them.” The word overcome was mostly used in terms of “overcoming obstacles” in phrases such as, “It is important for students to see the obstacles people have overcome to do what they do” or “it does show how the person has overcome challenges to create, and it can give inspiration.” Overall, the teachers’ responses suggest that those who choose to identify disability do so for various reasons; some perceive this important to understand the artist’s work or process, while others perceive the inclusion of artists with disabilities as an avenue to develop empathy and an avenue to normalize differences. The largest group of respondents described the reasons for identifying a disability

**Table 1**

*Count of Artists and Designers with Disabilities included as part of the curriculum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artists and Designers</th>
<th>Number of Teachers who listed the artist/designer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chuck Close</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida Kahlo</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henri Matisse</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent van Gogh</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Wiltshire</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Klee</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale Chihuly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith Scott</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Park</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yayoi Kusama</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnulf Stegmann</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bramblitt</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariusz Kędzierski</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurel Burch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia O’Keeffe</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as a means to highlight the success of individuals with disabilities and inspire students to persevere through obstacles.

Analysis

Inclusion of Disability

According to Valle and Connor (2019), “If non-disabled people are unfamiliar with actual people who have disabilities or their first-hand accounts, it usually means not understanding the world they experience at all” (p. 26). The descriptive information provided by the teachers suggests that the inclusion of disability in art rooms is primarily happening in three ways. First, students with IEPs are participating at high rates in inclusive classroom spaces with non-disabled peers. However, a few of the teachers’ comments about not wanting to draw attention to students with IEPs indicates that a culture exists in schools where having a disability is being perceived as being less-than or students being embarrassed by disability. Researchers suggest that the best method for dismantling this ableist notion is through engaging students to challenge cultural assumptions of disability through curricular content (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018; Valle & Connor, 2019). Through this survey, it became apparent that teachers engage in this work through two additional methods of inclusion. The majority of art teachers (82%) in this survey include artists with disabilities as part of the curriculum, at least some of the time. Finally, many art teachers also include other visual representations of disabilities, most commonly children’s books. By exposing children to book characters with disabilities, teachers can increase children’s understanding and acceptance of disability, which aligns with art teachers’ comments regarding empathy and efforts to make disabilities not seem so different (Wilkins et al., 2016). However, it is important to recognize that the representations of disability, both by artists and within media such as literature, should be carefully chosen so as not to fall into stereotypical tropes of disability prevalent in media. This includes the representation of people with disabilities as the object of pity, sinister and/or evil, a burden, incapable of fully participating in life, a supercrip, nonsexual, an object of violence, and laughable (Bilken & Bodgan, 1977).

Artists with Disabilities/Disabled Artists

Symeonidou (2019) describes the difference between disabled people doing art and disability art as an important distinction, in that disabled people doing art is any non-political art produced by disabled people while disability art shares the experience of disability. Furthermore, disability art is focused on living with an impairment and is often seen as “educative, transformative, expressive and participatory” as it presents the perspective of disability from someone who has a disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2001, p. 529). The idea of disabled people doing art can become problematic when introduced into curricula when it is purely about admiring people who create artwork similar to other able-bodied artists despite their impairment (Eisenhauer, 2007). While the teachers in this study indicate a high willingness and interest in including artists with disabilities as part of their curriculum, few artists from the list are engaging in disability art. In addition, some teachers express a hesitancy to discuss disability as part of an artist’s work and state they only discussed disability when relevant to the artist’s work.

How do teachers determine when to delineate whose work is and is not influenced by disability? This is where the comments made by teachers regarding the identification of disability...
“when relevant” becomes problematic. Process and content are inextricably tied to how we inhabit the world. Understanding the subtleties of the many ways in which artists with and without disabilities engage in artmaking is the benefit of utilizing and identifying works of art by artists of diverse abilities. From the list of artists, glassblower Chihuly could be described as a disabled person who does art. There is little information to suggest that the work’s content is directly related to his loss of vision, shoulder injury, or mental disabilities. However, the process of creating work and perhaps the form is influenced by his need to hire artists to help with the glassblowing process. In an interview, Chihuly stated that following the shoulder injury, “Once I stepped back, I liked the view,” as it allowed him to see the work from more angles and enabled him to anticipate problems faster (Hackett, 2006, n.p.). In contrast, an artist such as Stephen Wiltshire, who creates “perfectly scaled aerial illustrations” based upon his abilities, demonstrates a close relationship between artmaking and neurodiversity (Stephen Wiltshire, 2020, n.p.). His process and artmaking stand out because of his divergent ways of seeing, remembering, and creating. In order to fully appreciate the artwork of either of these artists, much like with children’s literature, the viewer should be made aware of the disability. As Siebers (2010) points out, “the rejection of disability limits definitions of artistic ideas and objects” (p. 3).

Researchers in disability studies have argued that disability arts have the ability to advance disability culture and claim disability aesthetics (Siebers, 2010). Others have said that the inclusion of disability arts in inclusive curricula counteracts the exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination of people with disabilities (Symeonidou, 2019). The survey results suggest that some artists being included are making art that falls within the category of disability arts, including the second most frequent artist listed, Frida Kahlo. Nevertheless, further inclusion of disability arts could be achieved. A repeated response on the survey was the idea of the inclusion of artists with disabilities as a means to teach perseverance. When non-disabled people depict disability, they can fall back on dominant stereotypes of disability (Symeonidou, 2019). One stereotype that exists in both movies and literature is the narrative that “people with disabilities can cure themselves through sheer force of will” (Disability Movies, 2020, n.p.). The contrast between art teachers’ sincere intent to be inclusive and inspiring and the problematic narrative that some reinforce illustrates the need for further inclusion of disability arts.

Conclusions

This survey provided data that illustrates how theories on inclusivity are currently being interpreted and implemented in Prekindergarten-12 education. Based on the teachers’ responses, it is clear that students with IEPs are being included in visual art and design education classrooms. However, it appears that students with IEPs are over-represented in many classrooms, and problematically stratification occurs in that there is a smaller proportion of students with IEPs in advanced classes. The information collected in this survey does not provide clear insight into why this is happening, although there could be several reasons. In the state of Illinois, visual arts classes are considered a language, and students must complete one language class in order to graduate high school. A disproportionate number of students with IEPs may be advised into an introductory visual arts class to complete the requirements. Alternatively,
because art, especially modern art, has historically embraced a disability aesthetic (Siebers, 2010), there could exist a perception that students with IEPs may be more accepted or successful in visual arts classes than other subject areas. However, the sample size was not large enough to reveal trends within subcategories, and future research with a larger sample size could reveal whether over-representation is occurring at all grade levels or specifically within secondary settings. In addition, a separate study incorporating advisors, students, and the academic placement process could lead to insights as to why a disproportionately high number of students are participating in visual arts yet not advancing to higher-level advanced classes. The inclusion of students with IEPs in the classrooms reinforces for all students the fact that human variation and differences are normal (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017); however, the responsibility for disability awareness should not fall on the students with disabilities, but rather on educators through the development of inclusive curricular content.

The educators’ responses regarding the inclusion of representations of disabilities in art and design classrooms provide insight into how the implementation of inclusion has moved, beyond inclusion as a placement in a particular setting, to curricular practices that include the representation and perspectives of people with disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). Representation of disability as described by the teachers took many visual forms and media. Artists with disabilities and children’s books were the most commonly featured examples. Further research with a more extensive data set could also provide insight into the types of media commonly used at specific age levels, as elementary teachers may be more likely to use children’s books and secondary teachers may be more likely to utilize resources such as movies, media, and advertising. In addition, information about this media would provide insight about the types of representations of disability that are being included in prekindergarten-12 classrooms. Participating teachers value the inclusion of artists and designers with disabilities. However, the data revealed conflicting information on the inclusion of disability perspectives, and more information is needed regarding engagement with artists whose work can be described as disability art. The analysis of this research suggests that further studies are needed to understand how teachers effectively incorporate disability art, aesthetics, and representations through their curricular approaches. In addition, future studies should incorporate students’ perspectives and examine the effects of curricular inclusion of disability.

As described by Symeonidou (2019), a genuine commitment to inclusive education in art and design education engages students with disability arts and representations of disability. In learning more about individual artists, students can learn how the subject matter of their work and the process of creating the work are impacted by differences related to disability. More importantly, the inclusion of disability art and visual representations of disability in media and culture, as part of the curriculum, can serve to illustrate the many ways people can inhabit, perceive, and represent the world around them. This has important implications for students to understand their own divergence and differences.
References


Visualizing Data to Engage Intra-active Art: Unsettling Gender Roles and Promoting Educational Responsibility

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This paper introduces Sweep it Under the Rug as an exhibition that occurred at a university gallery in the Southeastern United States during February 2020. The exhibition aimed to unsettle gender roles and promote educational responsibility by visualizing data from survey participants and installation collaborators on the topic of gender. The survey addressed the role of personal and cultural expectations on gender expression through a series of questions about family, language, and more. The author shares memories from and writing about the exhibition and thinks with Karen Barad’s concept of intra-action to explore how visualizing data might engage intra-active art as creative discourse between artwork and stakeholders that makes knowledge (visible) to effect change. The author suggests that intra-active art provokes feeling (loving), thinking (learning), and doing (becoming ethical and experimenting ethically) in (in)formal art education spaces, especially in a time of physical distance, and closes by wondering/wandering on about literal and abstract together-apartness in our current and future times.

Keywords: data visualization, intra-active art, gender roles, educational responsibility

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A little more than a year ago, around this time, some of us were greeting students with a smile or high-five, while others were revising syllabi with new required readings and learning engagements. I write this paper using memories from that very different time—one before physical distancing and COVID-19. During August 2019, I attended a campus tour with a group of incoming students as a way of getting acclimated to my new subtropical surroundings and faculty position. Toward the end of the tour, we entered the historic William Johnston Building (formerly the Dining Hall for the Florida State College for Women during the first half of the 20th century) and walked by Gallery 1006. Because the Fall semester had not yet started, the gallery lights were off in the empty space. Still, the intimacy of the space called to me, and I envisioned in it an exhibition that included a braided rag rug I had completed over the summer. I would later title the work *Sweep it Under the Rug*.

*Sweep it Under the Rug* was an art installation from early 2020 that visualized data on the topic of gender. The data were collected from about 20 volunteer survey participants and an unknown number of installation collaborators affiliated with a university in the Southeastern United States for the purpose of unsettling gender roles and promoting educational responsibility. The survey addressed the role of personal and cultural expectations on gender expression through a series of seven questions about family, language, ethnicity and/or race, religion, economic status, school and/or work, and media and/or social media (see sample responses, below).

- “What I have learned about gender from my family is to express competence because gender discrimination is so prevalent.”
- “What I have learned from my language(s) is to express anything I say or write about a person using gendered terminology, because that is what is ‘grammatically correct.’”
- “What I have learned about gender from my ethnicity and/or race is not to express anger because the angry Black man makes White people scared.”
- “What I have learned about gender from my religion(s) is not to express my inherent wildness, because tame assimilated women are acceptable.”
- “What I have learned about gender from my economic status to express the right price for my goods because people can be bought and sold.”
- “What I have learned about gender from my school and/or work is to express myself through gender-conforming clothing choices because non-conformity of dress is unprofessional.”
- “What I have learned about gender from the media and/or social media is to express queerness through song because singing along is fun.”

The exhibition was up for a month and began on February 7th with a performance in Gallery 1006 at my educational institution. As I mentioned, the space was intimate, but it was large enough to accommodate my body’s movements, a wooden broom and wicker basket,

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1 The number of collaborators is unknown because they were invited to intra-act with work at any time during business hours while the show was up for one month.

2 According to Kay and Ward (2016), “gender roles are socially and historically constructed norms that are deemed acceptable and appropriate for individuals based upon their assigned sex” (p. 2).
and a braided rag rug. I crafted the rug using recycled textiles from a previous exhibition on the topic of sexual identity (see Figure 1). The colors in the rug complemented circular vinyl decals onto which survey responses were printed. Cultural signifiers inspired some of the color pairings (survey responses that addressed economic status were printed on green colored decals), while other pairings were more arbitrary.

After greeting the viewers, I entered Gallery 1006 and emptied the decals from a large wicker basket onto the gallery floor. Then, I swept the decals under a braided rag rug (hence the artwork title). One by one, I collected each decal from under the rug, removed the backing, and pressed it onto the glass with circular gestures from inside the gallery. I repeated this step 100 times, while two graduate assistants (GAs) read aloud the survey.

3 The Panty Pennants installation from 2013 used stories collected from women to highlight sexual identity. I revealed their voices through audio, text, and by way of dyed and patterned forms. These forms resembled both thong panties and pennant flags and acted as a signifier for celebrating women and self-expression.
responses. The GAs seemed to read with intention and allowed for moments of silence between the responses. Every 10 minutes, the GAs stopped narrating to invite viewers to contribute to what they were seeing, hearing, and feeling by adding affirming visual and written text, or data, onto the glass wall that separated them from me, using materials like sticky notes, permanent markers, and liquid chalk markers. The affirming messages promoted educational responsibility when individuals became answerable to each other (Patel, 2016) and themselves through collaboration. After the performance ended, I thanked the GAs and collaborators and mentioned how strange it felt to be so close to yet separate from them.

This recollection jolts me back to the present and the together-apartness being asked of us by the COVID-19 pandemic, and, with inspiration from the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education’s (JSTAE) Call for Papers for Vol 41 (2020), I wonder how memories from and writing about the exhibition might “provoke and reimagine thinking, doing, and or feeling for our current and future times” (para. 3) through critical social theory. Specifically, I think with Karen Barad’s (2007) concept of intra-action as posthuman discourse and ask: In what ways might visualizing data engage intra-active art? I reply to the question after (a) sharing photographs from Sweep it Under the Rug during the performance (see Figure 2) and just days before tear-down (see figures 3-8) and (b) introducing two keywords important to this research: visualizing data and intra-active art. I close by presenting the findings (see Feeling, Thinking, and Doing for our Current and Future Times) and conclusions (see Wonderings and Wanderings).

Photographs from
Sweep it Under the Rug

Figure 2
Sarah Johns. Photograph of Sweep it Under the Rug performance and collaborator response at Gallery 1006
**Figure 3**
Tiffany Ward. Photograph of Sweep it Under the Rug in Gallery 1006

**Figure 4**
Tiffany Ward. Photograph of survey participant decal and installation collaborator response (foreground) and braided rag rug (background)
Figure 5
Tiffany Ward. Photograph of decal and response (foreground) and wooden broom and wicker basket (background)

Figure 6
Tiffany Ward. Photograph of several decals and responses
Figure 7
Tiffany Ward. Detail photographs of decals and responses

Figure 8
Tiffany Ward. Photograph of Sweep it Under the Rug from inside Gallery 1006
Form/Material and Genre/Concept

Earlier, I ask: *In what ways might visualizing data engage intra-active art?* I respond to this question (actually, a version of it) in the following section, after presenting two keywords that are important to the research: visualizing data and intra-active art. Specifically, I introduce data visualization as form and material and intra-active art as genre and concept.

**Visualizing Data: Form and Material**

In 2013, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Research Commission recognized a need for a Data Visualization Working Group (DVWG) to “advance the understanding, meaning, and relevance of research results, all of which are necessary for building a culture of research and for demonstrating the value of art education to stakeholders” (para. 4). Their “Call for Collaboration” (2013) stated, “Using research results depends on understanding research results, which depends on a researcher clearly communicating results. Data visualization can help all fronts” (para. 1, emphasis in original). The NAEA Research Commission’s DVWG website (n.d.), also seemed to suggest that data visualization aids in communicating and understanding information; specifically, the website mentioned that data visualization makes abstract information comprehensible so that we can make sense of the world around us. While data visualization often is employed in research and evaluation communities (NAEA Research Commission Data Visualization Working Group, 2013), the website discussed how artists might employ data as “material, medium, form and inspiration for art” (National Art Education Association Research Commission’s Data Visualization Working Group, n.d., para. 1) to help with the “visualization of ideas” (National Art Education Association Research Commission’s Data Visualization Working Group, n.d., para. 4).

**Sweep it Under the Rug** employed data both as form and material. As a reminder, the data were collected from volunteer survey participants and installation collaborators. The collaborators were invited to respond to the circular vinyl decals (*data as material*) that presented the survey responses (*data as form*) by adding affirming visual and written text (*data as form*) onto the glass wall, using materials like sticky notes, permanent markers, and liquid chalk markers (*data as material*). Employing data as form and material allowed participants and collaborators to communicate gender equity; it also offered collaborators an opportunity to communicate educational responsibility.

**Intra-Active Art: Genre and Concept**

On the evening of February 7, 2020, I read an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Script to viewers turned collaborators as an invitation to participate in the exhibition. I include an excerpt in what follows.

On the table [points in the direction of the table], you will find various materials available for your use. I invite you to intra-act with the exhibition, using affirming visual and/or written text on the glass wall between us. Together in our creative connectedness and communication, we can become “ethical subjects” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 190) by exceeding traditional modes of language and transcending the obstacles of negativity (Braidotti, 2013).

I have come to understand intra-active art both as genre and concept, while drawing from visual arts and posthumanism. According to John Parks (2015), “interactive art is a contemporary genre in which the audience is invited to participate in an artwork, effecting change in its appearance,
outcome, and meaning. By giving the audience this authority, the work departs radically from a long tradition of authorial control” (p. 94, emphasis added) in the arts. In posthumanism (and in metaphysics), intra-activity is knowledge that is mutually produced through discourse and matter (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). According to Barad (2008), discourse “is that which constrains and enables what can be said” (p. 137), and matter is a doing and an undoing—a verb, rather than a noun. I am particularly drawn to Barad’s (2007) concept of intra-action, or how we come to know when our experiences in and with the world inform what we can say. Thus, inspired by the visual art genre of interaction and the posthumanist concept of intra-action, I view intra-active art as creative discourse between artwork and stakeholders⁴ that makes knowledge (visible) to effect change.

**Visualizing Data to Engage Intra-active Art**

Spending time with visualizing data and intra-active art as keywords allows me to see a fuller research question materializing in the middle of writing about the exhibition. Specifically, I plug in for both keywords and wonder: *In what ways might [employing data as form and material] engage [creative discourse between artwork and stakeholders that makes knowledge (visible) to effect change]⁵?*

In the context of the exhibition under review, effecting change is related to unsettling gender roles and promoting educational responsibility. Both participants and collaborators worked to unsettle gender roles, while collaborators promoted educational responsibility. Participants employed written text via survey responses (see additional sample responses, below) to unsettle gender roles, and collaborators employed both visual and written text onto the glass gallery wall (see sample responses, below) to unsettle gender roles and promote educational responsibility. Photographs that captured the exhibition augment my memories and writing and aid in the presentation of the analysis found in tables 1-5.

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⁴ In the context of this research, stakeholders are the participants, collaborators, GAs, and me.

⁵ As a review, the original question asked: In what ways might visualizing data engage intra-active art?
### Table 1
**Participants: Written Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data as Form</th>
<th>Data as Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I have learned from my family not to express sadness because cis gender males don’t cry.”</td>
<td>White type on indigo circle vinyl decal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have learned from my ethnicity and/or race not to express my origins, heritage, or family history because of shameful backgrounds including illegitimate children, uneducated family members, and social class.”</td>
<td>White type on turquoise circle vinyl decal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have learned from my economic status to express myself politely and with grace because etiquette was highly valued in my home growing up, likely because of the SES [socioeconomic status] in which I was raised.”</td>
<td>Gray type on green circle vinyl decal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
**Collaborators: Visual Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data as Form</th>
<th>Data as Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="heart.png" alt="Heart" /></td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="people.png" alt="People" /></td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="clock.png" alt="Clock" /></td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker with black permanent marker outline on pink circle sticky note</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3
**Collaborators: Written Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data as Form</th>
<th>Data as Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I have a lot to learn…”</td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Somehow I have learned about myself from you.”</td>
<td>Black permanent marker on white square sticky note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am learning to become aware of and acknowledge my privileged status”</td>
<td>Black permanent marker on pink circle sticky note</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some installation collaborators seemed to put written text under erasure (see Derrida, 1967; Heidegger, 1956/1958), striking through specific text on survey response decals, which acknowledged and challenged linguistic signifiers. Two examples are provided below.

**Table 4**  
Collaborators: Written Text Under Erasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data as Form</th>
<th>Data as Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I have learned from my religion(s) not to express intelligence or question authority because girls ought to be quiet, timid and submissive.”</td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall and over white type on orange circle vinyl decal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have learned from my religion(s) not to express myself because there is a right and a wrong way to identify.” A collaborator goes on to state next to the survey response decal, “AND THIS IS A RIGHT WAY!!!” (see Figure 5, above).</td>
<td>White liquid chalk marker on glass wall and over white type on orange circle vinyl decal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5**  
Collaborators: Visual and Written Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data as Form</th>
<th>Data as Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“hello you are ❤️ beautiful”</td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“YOU ARE AMAZING 😈 remember that 😈”</td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You✿are beautiful✿✿ they are ✿ photoshopped✿✿”</td>
<td>Pink liquid chalk marker on glass wall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feeling, Thinking, and Doing for our Current and Future Times

With the revised research question in mind, as well as JSTAE’s Call for Papers’s, my memories and writing teach me that the creative discourse between artwork and stakeholders provokes feeling (loving), thinking (learning), and doing (becoming ethical and experimenting ethically) in (in)formal art education spaces, especially in a time when we are physically distant. The survey participant decals affected the installation collaborator responses, and the effect unsettled gender roles and promoted educational responsibility. The following outcomes focus on the shared feeling, thinking, and doing once the collaborators were invited into the discourse.

Loving, Learning to Unsettle Gender Roles

The collaborator data and analysis shared in the previous section includes visual text, written text, and visual and written text. The visual text pictured schemas like hearts and figures; the written text featured iterations of learn, learned, and learning; and the visual and written text highlighted a smiling face with sunglasses and repeated arrows and flowers, as well as adjectives like beautiful and amazing. Visualizing data with both visual and written text on the topic of gender expression works to unsettle gender roles by amplifying those narratives that otherwise have been historically silenced. Amplifying narratives also produces solidarity when collaborators share with the installation participants and viewers affirming messages on loving and learning. Building solidarity might work to challenge feelings like isolation when one’s gender expression does not align with the traditional ways of moving through the world. During these (and future) times when sexism, racism, and so many other -isms are prevalent, loving and learning are important to art education because they demonstrate a shared commitment to individual and community growth through an ethos of care.

Becoming Ethical and Experimenting Ethically to Promote Educational Responsibility

The affirming messages on love and learning also promoted educational responsibility when individuals became answerable to each other (Patel, 2016), themselves, and matter through collaboration that was socially connected but physically distant. Specifically, the creative discourse addressed complex social and educational problems and furthered educational responsibility goals that foregrounded ethics. Perhaps I anticipated the emphasis on ethics, as Braidotti’s (2013) work moved through me and the IRB Script, suggesting that collaborators and I could become “ethical subjects” (p. 190) together in our creative connectedness and communication by transcending the obstacles of negativity and exceeding traditional modes of language. St. Pierre, Jackson, and Mazzei (2016) also suggested that thinking and living beyond familiar structures can offer a turn toward the ethical when curiosity and experimentation meet new problems. As art educators, we are uniquely positioned to ask ourselves and our communities of learners to redefine critical thought (Braidotti, 2013) and “think and make another” (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016, p. 102) such that we work toward becoming ethical and experimenting ethically. Becoming ethical and

As a reminder, the Call for Papers (2020) asks for submissions “that provoke and reimagine thinking, doing, and or feeling for our current and future times” (para. 3).
experimenting ethically are important to art education during these (and future) uncertain times due to COVID because they enable us to be creative and revolutionary when faced with adversity.

**Wonderings and Wanderings**

*Feeling, thinking, and doing for our current and future times* doesn’t call me to “end” with a conclusion or implications, but rather, to wonder/wander on about the literal together-apartness in response to COVID-19 and the abstract together-apartness conjured up by sexism, racism, and similar -isms. My perspective of the *Sweep it Under the Rug* performance in early February 2020 (just one month before the initial U.S. lockdown), seems now like a premonition, as I reminisce about the fleeting moments when the installation collaborators’ eyes, smiles, and palms met my own across the glass wall of Gallery 1006. With this in mind, I suggest that art educators might consider ways to employ intra-active art in their classrooms and scholarship to incite creative discourse between artwork and stakeholders that makes knowledge (visible) to effect change and address together-apartness.

Wondering and wandering about literal and abstract together-apartness, I share additional memories about *Sweet it Under the Rug*, as well as some surprises. On occasion, a few memories from the show gently tug at my spirit. For example, I briefly mention the GAs above, but it’s important for me to share just how much they contributed to the success of the exhibition. I’d like to introduce graduate students, Egda and Julie, with whom I met on numerous occasions during Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 to discuss the performance and the responsibilities leading up to it. One of my favorite memories with Egda and Julie took place on January 31, 2020 when we three met to practice the performance. I smile when remembering how both seemed to offer insightful recommendations and constructive criticism without reservation. One excellent suggestion they made was to create planned pauses when reading the survey response narratives during the performance as a way to cue viewer participation. Another memory I enjoyed occurred just after the performance. Shortly after exiting the gallery, a participant approached me to share their “feelings of validation” when hearing the survey response they submitted read aloud. Finally, I recall dozens of visits to Gallery 1006 after arriving on campus each morning during the month of February. It was so wonderful spending quiet time with new messages left behind for survey participants from installation collaborators.

On occasion, I read messages that didn’t sit right with me because I didn’t view them as affirming. They weren’t surprising, but I am now surprised at how my removing the messages creates some tension in me. Specifically, I feel uneasy about censoring others; however, I would feel even more uneasy about not protecting survey participants who took risks by openly addressing the role of personal and cultural expectations on their gender expression. Another surprise worth mentioning is that I modified the IRB protocol three times, from October 2019 to February 2020, in response to how the exhibition called me to address its pleas. In other words, not only was I surprised by the exhibition’s agency, but also my openness about it. My last wondering/wandering is about seeing my reflection in the glass in photographs from *Sweep it Under the Rug*. I’m not sure I know what the reflection means, but I do appreciate how it makes me feel like the exhibition memories, Gallery 1006, visual and written text/data, IRB
protocol, Egda and Julie, survey participants, installation collaborators, together-apartness, and... are becoming part of me and my personal experiences and why/how I write up this paper and share it with you now as a way to further provoke and reimagine thinking, doing, and or feeling for our current and future times.
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When we say “dislocating the white gaze,” we are referring to a dislocation of the systems that have historically underserved some, such as disproportionately BIPOC student bodies, while upholding power structures that benefit others, namely white students.

Looking Back, Looking Forward: Resisting the White Gaze in Historical Narratives and Future Possibilities of Art Education

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Courtinnie N. Wolfgang
Virginia Commonwealth University

Looking back at art education’s past, the authors find too little space for some of us to situate ourselves. The histories and narratives of art education, as well as the curricula, are the histories and narratives of the victor and, according to DeVille (2018), “it’s garbage.” While there is much work to be done generally in regard to justice and equity in art education, in this manuscript, we posit a looking back at histories from outside the margin of the white supremacist patriarchy (hooks, 2013), looking to scholarship, teaching, and artistic production resisting the white gaze (Morrison, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2014b), and looking forward to a more racially just future of art education. We begin with a framework of Critical Race Theory, then review past multicultural efforts in (art) education through a critical race lens to provide a theoretical analysis of the role that whiteness played in these movements. We provide examples of artists creating art in active resistance to the white gaze and then discuss pedagogical and epistemological possibilities of resisting the white gaze (Morrison, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2014b). Finally, we conclude by looking forward, with hopeful prophecies for the future of art education.

Keywords: whiteness, anti-racist pedagogy, multicultural art education, history, multicultural education

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The summer of 2020 was a pivotal moment in history in the United States of America. On social media, we saw an onslaught of anti-racist resources, statements of solidarity, and proclamations of allyship—particularly, declarations of white and non-Black persons of color (NBPOC) allyship toward the Black community. The authors are geographically situated in a state with a long and violent history of anti-Black racism: one of the authors is located in Richmond, Virginia, the former so-called Capital of the Confederacy and the seat of months-long public and highly profiled protests of anti-Black racism during spring and summer 2020. The moment felt like a national reckoning of systemic racism via social media. As meaningful as it might have been to see discussions about race and racism with such frankness, how is this moment different? How much change might this increased visibility and attention toward systemic racism in the USA create? Hafeli (2009) argued that the field of art education is an eternal return, repeating scholarship as a result of a disregard for past voices while emphasizing current discourse. Buffington, in her 2019 Marantz Distinguished Alumni Award (AAEP, 2020), stated the importance of looking back on our field to learn and build upon the work of those who have come before us.

However, looking back at art education’s past, the authors find too little space for some of us to situate ourselves. The histories and narratives of art education, as well as the curricula, are the histories and narratives of the victor and, according to DeVille (2018) “it’s garbage.” While there is much work to be done generally in regard to justice and equity in art education, in this manuscript, we posit a looking back at histories from outside the margin of the white supremacist patriarchy (hooks, 2013), looking to scholarship, teaching, and artistic production resisting the white gaze (Morrison, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2014b), and looking forward to a more racially just future of art education. We begin with a framework of Critical Race Theory, then review past multicultural efforts in (art) education through a critical race lens to provide a theoretical analysis of the role that whiteness played in these movements. We provide examples of artists creating art in active resistance to the white gaze and then discuss pedagogical and epistemological possibilities of resisting the white gaze (Morrison, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2014b). Finally, we conclude by looking forward, with hopeful prophecies for the future of art education.

**Who we are**

We acknowledge our subjectivities in the work of justice pedagogies. We are: Hannah Sions- a cisgender, heterosexual, Asian, neurodivergent woman of color and Courtnie Wolfgang- a cisgender, gay/queer, white woman. While neither of us experience the privileges of what hooks (2009) refers to as the heteropatriarchy, neither of us have experiences of blackness. While racism is not exclusive to bias against blackness, we submit that racial sociocultural politics regarding blackness in the United States of America were centered during the uprisings of the summer of 2020 and largely inform the history and analysis forthcoming. We also submit that the extensive work of moving toward anti-racist pedagogies in art education is assigned to all of us, not just those directly affected by anti-Black racism (Wolfgang, 2019). Blackness and whiteness are both socially constructed—however whiteness relies on false claims of superiority and therefore has historically (Alexander, 2010) occupied the point around which all other experiences and rights.
must pivot. What we present moving forward is an offering of the historical, educational, and artistic movements that have flourished in spite of historical erasure, violence, and suppression as a result of the construction of whiteness.

**Framing the conversation:**

**Critical race theory**

Critical race theory seeks to identify the role of racism in history and society and provide a counternarrative that challenges the status quo. It also recognizes the connection that racism has to other forms of white supremacy (e.g., classism, patriarchy, homophobia, etc.) and highlights societal, legal, and historical forces that perpetuate discrimination of individuals based on their race, gender-identity, sexuality, etc. (Carbado, 2011). Critical race theory also asserts that racism and racial hierarchy has been written into the American legal system to benefit white individuals and disadvantage Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Crenshaw et al., 1995). For the purpose of this paper, we borrow Kendi’s (2019) definition of race: “a power construct of collected or merged differences that lives socially” (p. 35). Racism is not limited to blatant acts of racial discrimination, but is just as harmful through subtle microaggressions that slowly wears down the receiver of these acts (Delgado & Stefanie, 2017). To put it simply, racism is ubiquitous, and action is needed to create change (Delgado & Stefanie, 2017; Valdes et al., 2002). Many critical race scholars originated from disciplines outside of law, as such, critical race theory is inherently interdisciplinary (Gaztambide-Fernández, et al., 2018). Because of these interdisciplinary roots, the adoption of critical race theory into education is not unexpected. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were early champions of critical race theory in education. In this introductory article, the authors posit that social inequities, at large and in schools, are based on three tenets:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social – and consequently school – inequities (p. 48).

Ladson-Billings and Tate acknowledged that racial inequities were not separate from class or gender-based inequities, and that these forms of identity intersected each other. They did argue, however, that race was untheorized while theoretical considerations for gender and class existed to a greater extent.

To counter dominant and existing narratives, critical race scholars emphasized counter-narrative and qualitative research methods to highlight the lived experiences of BIPOC, and as a continuation of disrupting the notion of objectivity in research (Dixon & Anderson, 2017).

Critical race theory is a very intentional fight against racial power, but pragmatically recognizes that the fight against racial inequities must be in alignment with white interest (Bell, 1995; Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this knowledge makes it so that all efforts to dismantle racism have to be in ways that are tolerable to whiteness (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2018), which creates a push and pull dynamic that prevents large reform. This

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1 For the purposes of this manuscript, we use BIPOC to be inclusive of Black, Indigenous, and Non-Black people of color when discussing racism toward non-white people. We use Black when historically or contextually relevant related specifically to racism toward Black people.
dynamic is visible in multicultural efforts in education, where the demands of BIPOC were met with superficial changes that integrated diversity without challenging the status quo. The following section examines multicultural (art) education and how whiteness has impacted its ability to respond to the needs of BIPOC students.

**Multicultural (art) education and whiteness**

Multicultural education scholars credit African American scholars including W.E.B. Du Bois, Horace Mann Bond, George Washington Williams, Charles H. Wesley, and Carter G. Woodson for changing the parameters of traditional scholarship in America (Banks, 1996) by challenging existing understandings of knowledge (Banks, 1995a). At this time, African American scholars were fighting to be visible and acknowledged by a white field. Still, despite whiteness dominating scholarship these scholars pushed to have their perspectives and scholarship recognized (Banks, 1995a).

One of the earlier attempts to incorporate multicultural curriculum into education was the intergroup-education movement in the 1940s and 50s. This movement was the result of the displacement of Southern Black and white individuals during WWII. As they settled into new cities, riots erupted from building racial tensions (Banks, 1988). The intergroup-education movement was the response to these riots, in an effort to reduce the racial tension and prejudice. Whiteness, unfortunately, can be identified as the demise of the intergroup-education movement, as white educators only saw its need in racially diverse schools. As such, it was never adopted in most schools in the United States (Banks, 1988).

The Civil Rights movement brought multicultural education to be implemented into schools across the nation. Black and other POC activists demanded changes, such as the hiring of more Black teachers, positive representations of Black history and Black life in curriculum, and rewriting of textbooks to reflect that. Activists pointed to the lower academic achievement of minority and low-income students as proof of the failings of existing curriculum (Banks, 1988). As a response, multicultural education was introduced into schools. From the beginning, however, whiteness derailed the efficiency of multicultural education--these multicultural efforts did not change the existing curriculum, only added multicultural content to existing school content (Banks, 1988). The curriculum was still grounded on knowledge that was written within a framework of whiteness first, and cultures were viewed through a similar lens. Since then, scholars have challenged the white supremacy that underpins the curriculum in United States public schools.

In the early stages of the multicultural art movement, scholars analyzed multicultural texts to identify practices and limitations (Gibson, 1976; Pratt, 1983; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). In an analysis of 127 multicultural articles and books, Sleeter and Grant (1987) identified five approaches to multicultural teaching: teaching the culturally different; human relations; single group studies; education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist; and multicultural education. Their analysis identified that each of these methods introduced diversity into curriculum and, in some instances, made room for students from different cultural backgrounds to share their cultures. Tomhave (1995) analyzed multicultural art education literature utilizing the framework created by Sleeter and Grant (1987) and Gibson (1976). His analysis found that multicultural art education literature from 1976 to 1989 focused...
on the following approaches: acculturation/assimilation, bi-cultural education/cross-cultural research, cultural separatism, multicultural education theory, social reconstruction, and cultural understanding. However; these methods centered whiteness: an emphasis was put on assimilation and/or the assumption that intergroup relations, without addressing inequities (such as power; bias, and social constructs) would resolve the issue of racism in curriculum (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Failure to address the discrimination that BIPOC students experience, but endorsing the benefits of integration, demonstrates a “color-blind” ideology where the failure to acknowledge race “legitimates and thereby maintains the social, economic, and political advantages that whites hold over other Americans…” (Gotanda, 1995, p. 257). Desai (2010) suggests that colorblind racism in art education avoids discussing race while covertly expressing racial views and overlooking systemic racism.

Grant and Sleeter (1998) recognized the shortcomings of the early stages of multicultural education, acknowledging that educational equity was not being achieved through these efforts. As a response to their early analysis, Grant and Sleeter (1998) introduced practical multicultural teaching methods, putting much emphasis on the gap between BIPOC students’ experiences and the predominantly white teaching force. Banks (1995b) introduced the five dimensions of multicultural education, which identified that true change could only happen with an overhaul of the structure of education. Banks believed that education equity would only be achieved with five main changes to education: the integration of cultures throughout curricula; understanding the influence of cultures on knowledge construction; identification of students’ racial biases; addressing and changing inequitable social structures in schools; and providing diverse teaching practices to accommodate all different types of learners. During this same period, Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, a landmark perspective where BIPOC students were seen for their contributions and knowledge in school spaces. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that preexisting multicultural literature only perceived BIPOC students from a deficit lens, measuring students based on their academic struggles without attention to the context of more broad educational inequity and failing to acknowledge the contributions that diverse student experiences bring. The deficit lens is complicated further by inherently biased curriculum and policies in schools that disproportionately underserve students of color (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). Unlike earlier efforts toward multicultural pedagogies, these scholars challenged the inherent structure of education, (deficit) perceptions of BIPOC students, and the relationships and power dynamics between white educators and their BIPOC students. Yet, educational scholarship in art/education seems to be stuck in place on repeat—renaming and redefining ways to address inequities in schools. Ladson-Billings’ Culturally Relevant Pedagogy inspired additionally scholarly and pedagogical approaches: culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000), cultural competence (McAllister & Irvine, 2000), culturally connected pedagogy (Izaryar, 2007), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014a). In art education, we saw critiques of multicultural art practices that simplified cultures (Stout, 1997) or misinterpreted artwork through a Western lens (Desai, 2005). Critical multicultural art education became the term used to describe pedagogy where inequities were combated with critical
understanding, critical analysis, and critical thinking (Acuff, 2016; Holloway & Krensky, 2001). At the same time, social justice themes that moved beyond race were introduced into multicultural education and multicultural art education scholarship. Social justice pedagogy advocated for an equitable education for all students, recognizing marginalization beyond race and ethnicity and included gender, sexuality, gender-identity, disabilities, social/economic inequities, class, and religion (Au, 2014; Bailey & Desai, 2005; Brooks, 2012; Congdon et al., 2002; Derby, 2011; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Fiarman, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Seider, 2011): an intersectional approach where the “dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics.” (Cho et al., 2013. p. 787).

While anti-racism has seemingly become part of a popular lexicon in the summer of 2020, where celebrities and corporations are making space for actively anti-racist declarations via social media and advertising, the concept of anti-racist education is not new. Dei (1996) provided ten principles that are necessary to an anti-racist education:

1. Recognize the social effects of race.
2. Understand race through an intersectional lens.
3. Recognize and challenge white power and privilege.
4. Unpack marginalization: who experiences it and how it is perpetuated.
5. Education should be holistic, appreciating social, cultural, political, ecological, and spiritual aspects of students’ experiences.
6. Focus on students’ construct of identity and its relation to school.

7. Identify and confront challenges to diversity in schools and society.
8. Be transparent about the role education has played in the marginalization of students.
9. Connect and contextualize students’ lived experiences into curriculum, as their lives cannot be separated from their education.
10. Critically analyze how education dismisses students instead of diverting blame to family environments (pp. 27-35).

Lee (1985) wrote about anti-racism in education and its goals, stating that “Anti-racist education emerges from an understanding that racism exists in society, and therefore, the school, as an institution of society is influenced by racism” (p. 8). Anti-racist education aims to abolish racism in all its iterations. Anti-racist education responds to the notion that existing curriculum is oppressive and exclusionary for BIPOC students (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2013); anti-racist curriculum is needed for education to meet the needs of all students, to help support BIPOC students and prepare all students for a diverse world (hooks, 2003). According to Brinson and Smith (2014) all parties involved in the field of education must become anti-racist to close the achievement gap, include broader perspectives in curriculum, and have a more diverse teaching force. This would require education to center anti-racism as a goal, emphasizing the need to confront institutional racism, racial inequality, and celebrate diversity without appropriation or exploitation (Cole, 2009). Without anti-racist considerations, diversity efforts in education will be superficial, “like a movie set made of cardboard: while it may appear authentic, it will take little to knock it down and reveal it as a sham” (Nieto, 1995, p. 195).
What’s keeping us from moving forward?

A fundamental roadblock to anti-racism work is that inequality cannot truly be addressed without honest conversations about (systemic) racism (Kendi, 2019). We posit that without deeper understanding of the implications of systemic racism, efforts toward multiculturalism, diversity, equality, equity, tolerance, acceptance, decolonization, abolition, and justice are relegated to buzzwords: they exist only as a mask, easily removed when the undergirding of dominant discourse prevails (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2014) states there is a “static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant. Many practitioners...seem stuck in very limited and superficial notions of culture” (p. 77). Similarly, in interviews about her theory of intersectionality, and the misconceptions of what it means to be intersectional, Crenshaw (Coaston, 2019; Steinmetz, 2020) begins by outlining “what it’s not” because its definition has been stretched beyond her intentions as the idea became further removed from its original context. Crenshaw explains that,

[intersectionality is] not identity politics on steroids. It is not a mechanism to turn white men into the new pariahs...We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts (Steinmetz, 2020, para 2).

During the summer of 2020, a national uprising for racial justice in the USA resulted in prolific visibility of Black lives and movements toward anti-racist education; more specifically, tactics for educating white individuals on how to be anti-racist. For Hannah, it was in this moment that she started to question the extent that whiteness is almost always centered in “popular” anti-racism (Bejan, 2020; McWhorter, 2020) and, as a result, questioned the capabilities of anti-racist discourse. For Courtnie, she remarked on the language and action-policing from white person to white person- a theater of “wokeness” playing out via formerly actively-unpolitcized spaces of social media. In both cases, the centering of white experience in anti-racist dialogue was notable. We both felt anxious that the upswell in visibility and calls to action for racial justice would settle back to a status quo. Or that the newly highly politicized landscape would continue to be theater for white communities: a play to appear justice-oriented for social media audiences. And what does any of that have to do with art and education?

The authors posit that the centering of whiteness and the (unearned) privileges therein in policies and curricula in art education are partially to blame for a lack of movement toward racial justice in the field. And that the theater of change—a change in name only—keeps the field stuck. According to Kendi (2019), “when our policy does not produce racial equity, we blame the people...not our flawed policy solution...what if we blamed our ideologies and methods, studied our ideologies and methods, refined our ideologies and methods again and again until they worked?” (p. 214). Critical race theory states that change cannot happen without white individuals intentionally giving up their power:

Whites may agree in the abstract that blacks are citizens and are entitled to constitutional protection against racial discrimination, but few are willing to recognize that racial segregation is much more than a series of quaint customs that can be remedied effectively without altering the status of...
whites...whites simply cannot envision the personal responsibility and the potential sacrifice inherent in black’s conclusion that true equality for blacks will require the surrender of racism-granted privileges for whites (Bell, 1995, p. 22)

Educators who claim commitment to equity in schools must also be committed to the unlearning of historically biased pedagogies and curricula- and their direct or indirect complicity in those systems (Wolfgang, 2019). Educators must also commit to the practice of getting unstuck: to build new knowledge continuously toward justice in teaching and learning and to acknowledge the practice (how we teach) as well as the content (what we teach) is essential to undoing racism in art education. None of these ideas is revolutionary: as the literature included here suggests, we are not the first to claim them. What we offer next are considerations for the field that help one to remain unstuck in the work of justice pedagogies in art education moving forward.

Moving forward

Sions: Unfortunately, almost as quickly as it came, I saw fewer conversations about anti-racism and racial justice; the lack of media attention to ongoing protests perpetuated the false narrative that the movement was decelerating. Discouraged, I began reflecting on anti-racism and diversity efforts that accommodated whiteness and started to wonder what these things would look like if we were to remove whiteness as a consideration from these movements. What would our field and scholarship look like if we dislocated whiteness as the center around which all other scholarship orbits?

Wolfgang: As a white accomplice to anti-racist pedagogy, how will I continue to deeply investigate my past and current complicity in systems that uphold white supremacy in art education (Wolfgang, 2019)? What are the pedagogical and epistemological considerations that should inform my practice in the midst of a national uprising for racial justice and living and working in a city trying to heal from its legacy of racial violence?

We acknowledge the contributions of white allies who use their privilege in pursuit of equality (Bell, 1995). Still, it is our belief that contemplating futures that center voices historically relegated to the margins is an essential practice in art education moving forward if we are to imagine even the possibility of a post-racist future. The field of art education has already begun these conversations. Art Education, the journal of the National Art Education Association, recently published two issues dedicated to the future of art curriculum. In these issues, authors wrote about some considerations for the future of our field, such as teaching in the wake of Black Lives Matter (Kraehe & Herman 2020), shifting methods of assessment (Hogan et al., 2020), an empathetic curriculum that allows student reflection (Wilson, 2020), curriculum in a post-pandemic world (Kraehe, 2020), and civically engaged art education (Fendler et al., 2020). Further, Acuff (2020) has proposed reimagining art education through an Afrofuturistic lens, giving “Black students the agency to actively create their existence and futures” (p. 20), providing a counternarrative of possibilities in response to the mass erasure of Black experience. The Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education has also dedicated three issues to exploring the role of whiteness in our field, specifically to unpack the power and influence that whiteness has (Acuff, 2019). Author Toni Morrison spent her career making “sure that the white gaze was not the dominant one in any of [her] books” to push against the existing notion that whiteness must
be prominent for writing to be “good” (PBS, 2020). Moving forward, what is actively anti-racist scholarship and practice in art education in resistance to the white gaze; the assumption that the reader or audience isn’t (primarily) white? (Morrison, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2014b)

**How and what we teach**

The authors posit that an investigation of pedagogical and epistemological underpinnings of how we teach is as necessary as what we teach to unlearn teaching for the white gaze. At the start of the fall semester 2020, Wolfgang witnessed administration at her university using language like “decolonize” and “abolition” for the first time publicly in regard to curriculum and pedagogy. A workshop titled “Decolonizing Your Syllabus” was offered for faculty. Meanwhile, amid panic of COVID related budget cuts, teaching faculty were subject to increased teaching and service loads, adjunct and staff positions were cut, departmental leadership was dissolved and consolidated without faculty governance. The institution seemed set on the theater of decolonization and abolition by declaring it the responsibility of teaching faculty without acknowledging the systems of oppression the institution continued to uphold. Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us that “decolonization” is not a metaphor, rather rooted in the abolition of settler colonialism and the restitution of indigenous rights and lands. “Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation” (p.7). Love (2019) cites abolitionist teaching as inclusive of boycotting and protesting; calling out racism, homophobia and islamophobia; centering Black joy and love in pedagogy. It felt unlikely that the institution was positioning itself for decolonization nor abolition by these definitions. The authors thereby question the institutional or pedagogical use of “decolonizing” related to practice that is not explicitly related to restitution of indigenous rights or the use of “abolition” if the structures of oppression and power are not ceded.

Likewise, we are not suggesting these methods are decolonizing art education, lest we fall into the same well-intentioned albeit misguided and harmful stasis Tuck and Yang refer to. Instead, we suggest that these methods might help one dislocate the white gaze, opening space to reimagine pedagogies and epistemologies of a possible future: more relevant, more inclusive, more sustaining, more just.

**Dislocating the authority of the white gaze**

When we say “dislocating the white gaze,” we are referring to a dislocation of the systems that have historically underserved some, such as disproportionately BIPOC student bodies, while upholding power structures that benefit others, namely white students. We further suggest that the white gaze, or assuming a white audience, when developing pedagogies and epistemologies of art education is undergirded by white supremacy and is damaging to all students or learners but have specific and lasting negative impact on BIPOC students. Wolfgang acknowledges that her education and preparation to become a teacher did not include perspectives that decentered white experience—nor did her personal experiences as a white person. Therefore, the imperative for white teachers in particular to take audit of their materials and teaching practices— and enact meaningful changes— is paramount.
What we teach - curriculum audit

Buffington & Bryant (2019) encourage arts educators to reconsider the content of arts curricula, generally finding “multicultural” art education efforts lacking. They researched popular shared lessons via social media and found overwhelmingly a whitewashed approach to teaching about diverse cultures. Further, scholars have argued for the necessity of culturally sustainable representation in arts, academic, and educational spaces as a catalyst for deep personal engagement (Sions & Coleman, 2019).

This representation is often found in popular culture. Solange Knowles unapologetically makes space for blackness, with songs like F.U.B.U. (for us, by us) (2016) stating “[I] made this song to make it all y’all’s turn / for us, this shit is from us / get so much from us / then forget us.” Her most recent album, “When I Get Home,” continues her message of Black solidarity through her lyrics: “Black skin, black braids / black waves, black days / Black baes, black things / these are Black-owned things / Black faith still can’t be washed away” (2019). Lizzo (2019) celebrates all aspects of her identity in her music: her blackness, fatness, and womanhood: “I was born like this, don’t even gotta try / I’m like chardonnay, get better over time / heard you say I’m not the baddest, bitch, you lied.” Beyoncé praises Black beauty in Brown Skin Girl (Beyoncé et al., 2019): “Brown skin girl / your skin just like pearls / the best thing in the world / never trade you for anybody else.” The lyrics sing about Black beauty, but not Black beauty living in a world of whiteness or Black beauty assimilating to white standards, but the beauty of brown skin. The nation of Wakanda in Black Panther (Coogler, 2018) highlights African cultures to imagine a world without settler colonization. Molly of Denali (2019) is a show on PBS Kids about an Indigenous child, that includes Indigenous language, and is, voice-acted and written (KUAC, 2019) by Indigenous people. Hamilton was recognized for its racially diverse casting of white historical figures (Kail & Miranda, 2020). Nalgona Positivity Pride (2021) is rooted in Xicana Indigenous feminism and DIY punk culture.

Wolfgang (2019) argued that students do not need only to be taught about BIPOC artists, they need white teachers to teach that they value BIPOC artists and their narratives as much as they value whiteness in the arts. Two essential pedagogical shifts must happen: white teachers must acknowledge the construction of whiteness in their own education and actively unlearn harmful norms that privilege whiteness and sustain perceptions of white supremacy in art education. Second, introduce artists who push back on norms of whiteness, Euro-centrism, heterocentrism, ableism, and other systems of oppression and to make the concepts of that work part of arts education as well as the inclusion of the artists themselves in the curriculum. Inclusion (alone) is a language of appeasement (Stewart, 2017), not a practice of justice or equity. We put forward the following contemporary visual artists as examples of radical BIPOC love for dislocating the white gaze in arts education:

Visual artist Simone Leigh was recently spotlighted as the first Black woman to represent the U.S. at Venice Biennale (Sheets, 2020). Her work is created with Black women as her primary audience, much of her work focuses on celebrating Black beauty and Black women (Pogrebin & Sheets, 2018).

Artist Kerry James Marshall responds to the exclusion of Black subjects in artwork by focusing on Black experiences in his work
Mason, 2016). In doing so, he creates a space for himself rather than waiting for room to be made.

Osborne Macharia’s photographs depict the “future aspirations of people of colour using narrative, fantasy and fiction to highlight African identity” (Leiman, 2018, para 10).

Photographer Zanele Muholi’s work celebrates Black queer communities in South Africa since the early 2000s. Their photographs are an act of resistance, during a time where hate crimes and negative stigmas against the queer community in Africa were at a high (Guggenheim, n.d.).

Multimedia artist Wendy Red Star utilizes multiple forms of expression, including sculpture, fiber arts, video, photography, and performance (Mass MOCA, n.d.). A member of the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe, her work seeks to challenge and change inaccurate narratives about Native people and their culture by revisiting existing historic artifacts and imagery. Wendy Red Star also creates interactive exhibitions that allow the preservation of her culture.

Aboriginal Australian multimedia artist and activist, Richard Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, and Gurang Gurang communities. His artwork challenges stereotypes associated with aboriginal art (French, n.d.). Bell explains, “I recognize some people find [my work] contentious, and that my paintings attract controversy. This response has nothing to do with me; the response has to do with the viewer” (Farley & Portalewska, 2011, para 1).

Having experienced first-hand the mistreatment of aboriginal people by the Australian government, Bell’s artwork does not cater to white fragility, but rather tackles race politics head on (Farley & Portalewska, 2011).

These artists, we posit, dislocate the white gaze enabling educators to bring culturally responsive content into teaching and learning spaces. We acknowledge, however, that there is much work left to be done. Beyoncé is criticized as avoiding a disruption of whiteness and, instead, representing her privileged upbringing (Dubler, 2014). Klein (2020) and Morin (2020) point of that the Broadway hit Hamilton has been scrutinized for its glorification of Alexander Hamilton without directly addressing his history as an enslaver. We stress that inclusion alone, on the principles of design, technique, or process, of any of these artists and their work is insufficient without also including the context of the work explicitly. Without that context, art educators are in danger of exploiting BIPOC artists by silencing the message behind their work.

How we teach it

The foundations of education in the USA are historically traced back to white interests (Banks, 1995b), which includes practices of teacher authority as opposed to shared governance in a learning environment. Instead, we ask ourselves about the possibilities of:

Sharing the ownership of your curriculum with your students: How involved are your students in shaping the assignments and grading for your class (Elbow, 2008)? Wolfgang employs a pedagogy of Collaborative Syllabus writing2 and Contract Grading3 as a method of dislocating staid practices of curriculum building that are teacher-centered. In doing this Wolfgang seeks to disrupt what can be assumed, according to Banks (1995b), methods that privilege white values.

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2 https://openpedagogy.org/course-level/collaborative-syllabus-design-students-at-the-center/
3 https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/i-have-seen-glories-grading-contract

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Considering collaborative guiding principles or code of conduct as opposed to top-down rules: Do your students have a say in the conduct of your class space? How open are you to feedback from students? How much of your behavior management was learned by you as a student? How effective is it? Wolfgang refers students to the Digital Library Federation Code of Conduct as a model of participatory conduct codes that honor intersectional experiences. Sions gives students multiple points of contact throughout the semester to provide the instructor with feedback. For example, during the COVID pandemic, students were asked to participate in an anonymous online survey indicating their feelings of safety in attending face to face courses and practicum placements. As a result, Sions made modality adjustments within reason to accommodate students, putting their safety and learning above the imperative to be face to face only.

Making yourself human, fallible, but do not ignore the existing power dynamic: The teacher/student power dynamic is always in place, no matter what one does to diminish it. Acknowledge it and make efforts to mitigate the effects of it without pretending it is not a factor. Wolfgang acknowledges the complexity of this, and encourages teachers to practice transparency and humility with their students at every stage of their learning. Dislocate the notion that as a teacher you should “know everything” or that everybody holds the same knowledge upon entering your classroom—expectations that are often rooted in white-centered experience (Banks, 1995b). Tell your students, directly, what they can expect from you as their teacher. Teachers sometimes ask students to sign contracts of expectation that are scripted by the instructor but less often make themselves vulnerable to contracts scripted by the students. There are methods to mitigate the power dynamic, however it cannot be eliminated completely. The best one can do is to lean into that knowledge and move forward with as much transparency and fairness as possible (acknowledging that the teacher, as the power-holder, must do the work to mitigate that relationship).

Being open to change of direction: Modify assignments, be flexible with due dates, respond to student feedback (direct or indirect). Let your classroom be a living creature that ebbs and flows with the tide. For example, rethink penalties for late work. Why have them? How might it further de-incentivize student engagement? What possibilities are held by working with students on a flexible timeline to produce their best work? Foucault (1975) tells us that power disguises itself in institutional language. Wolfgang’s practice includes dislocating the reified, common, yet NOT required (per her university guidelines or job description) imperatives for penalizing students for work submitted late, for example. By not only asking herself “what is the most important thing I want my students to LEARN?” but also “What are they learning from me through this practice?” it became clear that student growth was not at the center of penalties for late work, missed classes.

4 https://www.diglib.org/about/code-of-conduct/

5 The authors would like to acknowledge the complexity or difficulty of learning online for some students while also acknowledging the expanded access and equity for other students with the proliferation of online learning environments during COVID.
inflexible curricula; power and control, as well as Wolfgang’s learned practices as a student herself informed those decisions. For Sions, deadlines for assignments are encouraged to be met for class discussions and course pacing, however, students may contact the instructor at any point for an extension without penalty.

Reconsidering what constitutes a “good student”: How much of your assessment of how a good student performs/behaves is rooted in white school culture and values systems? How open are you to reimagining successful performance in your classroom? For instance, for university and college teachers, do you assign points for “attendance”? If so, why? How is attendance or being “on time” a quantifiable measure of a student’s academic ability? Are there multiple modes of engagement encouraged? There is a lot to be said about this, more than the boundaries of this section will allow in this article. We strongly recommend the writing of authors like Love (2019) as well as her work with the Abolitionist Teaching Network; Morris (2015); Smith et al., (2018); Moore et al. (2018), and others to critically reflect on the subjectivity of student performance and the history of pedagogies and assessment that produce violence on Black and Brown students (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2013). Smith et al. (2018); Moore et al. (2018) and others, to critically reflect on the subjectivity of student performance and the history of pedagogies and assessment that produce violence on Black and Brown students (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2013).

Dislocating the white gaze in pedagogy, epistemology, and curriculum is not the end goal. It is a step toward a goal of more just, equitable, and meaningful arts education for all students. In this article, we have looked back on multicultural (art) education, utilizing a critical race lens to understand the role of whiteness in these movements. We posit that moving forward would require educators to re-examine what and how they teach by reconsidering which pedagogical practices are built on white cultural expectations. We introduced artists who actively resist the white gaze, providing suggestions for how one might dislocate the white gaze when examining and creating art. Finally, we conclude this article by providing considerations for pedagogical practices that redefine the roles of the educator and student.

Anti-racism requires hope, a belief that racism is not indestructible and that change can happen (Kendi, 2019). We offer these pedagogical, epistemological, and curricular considerations of dislocating the white gaze in art education as an offer of hope. The uprisings of the summer of 2020 bled into the fall election cycle of the same year. President Trump issued the Executive Order on Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping in September of 2020 (The White House, 2020), and increased fear of institutional, social, and political retaliation rippled through many communities of educators committed to justice education and to the protection and well-being of their students. While the newly elected President of the United States, Joseph Biden, swiftly issued a new executive order that mitigated some of the fears brought on by

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6 The extent of flexibility for any teacher is subjective per their job requirements. However, we posit that the root of this pedagogy is intended to dislocate unexamined practices that many teachers take for granted.

7 https://abolitionisteachingnetwork.org/
Trump’s order, the takeaway that many of us felt was that protections for underserved, marginalized communities and the folks actively in pursuit of justice must be vigilantly defended. We are hopeful, however, that the horizon burns bright with justice. And that art educators will take up the mantle of radical justice moving forward.
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**Sions, H. & Wolfgang, C.** / Resisting the White Gaze

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Sions, H. & Wolfgang, C. / Resisting the White Gaze

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education / Volume 41 (2021)
There is a need for many of us to move past an art pedagogy of qualified inclusion and tokenized representation, and to incorporate what we teach into how we teach.

“Press Charges”: Art Class, White Feelings, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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I reflect on the decade I spent as an art teacher in a Chicago high school where so-called "behavioral issues" are rampant, as well on my experience working with incarcerated adults, in order to explain the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline with the aid of recent research on discipline and policing. I go on to talk about a September 2019 thread in an art teacher group on Facebook. On this thread, predominantly white teachers overwhelmingly called for a teacher who was hit while breaking up a fight to press charges against the student who struck him, purportedly for the students’ own good. I examine all of these experiences in light of America’s history of racial repression and control, and throughout the essay I reflect on the important role played by teachers’ feelings in determining the material fates of students and their families.

Keywords: school-to-prison pipeline, race and affect, schools and mass incarceration, race and art education, social media and education, policing in schools

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The Power of Feelings

I am a White teacher who taught art for ten years at a public high school that serves a low-income Black and Latinx neighborhood in the segregated city of Chicago, Illinois, USA. My classes comprised a vast array of personalities and interests, and my students brought all kinds of verbal, visual, kinetic, and musical creativity into my art classroom every day, as well as a wide variety of life experiences and cultural knowledge. Over the years they helped me more than I can express, in terms of fostering my own learning and growth as a person and as a teacher: There were great adults in the building as well, but the young people I was able to work with were some of the most perceptive, grounded, gracious, funny, generous, and thoughtful I ever hope to meet.

While I worked at the school, the numerous excellent qualities of the students and the community were not reflected in the material or political circumstances of the surrounding neighborhood, which I walked through every day on my way to and from work. The school is in an area that was abandoned decades ago by both industrial capital and White residents, and the neighborhood additionally suffers from longer-term structural and intergenerational effects of White supremacist violence, including the simultaneous over- and under-policing experienced by similar neighborhoods in the city (Kalven, 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). There were many students who regularly received in-school and out-of-school suspensions for what were perceived as disruptive actions. While my classroom materials and my dignity were sometimes damaged by rambunctious behavior, more dire consequences were regularly enacted on students by school officials (not to mention parents). In this essay, I plan to talk about my own secondhand experience of official punishment, within and beyond schools, and how this relates directly to institutional racism on one hand, and, on the other, to art teachers and the culture of art education.

The idea of a school-to-prison pipeline has entered the public discourse over the last couple of decades (Curtis, 2014; Fuentes, 2013; Heitzeg, 2009; Meiners, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Nelson & Lund, 2015; New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013; Peak, 2015; Rios, 2011; Rovner, 2016; Sojoynner, 2016; Thusi, 2011; Urban Youth Collaborative, 2011). This concept applies to schools like the one at which I taught, where harsh disciplinary policies and an on-site police presence contribute to the wider mass incarceration phenomenon disproportionately affecting young people of color. Our school resource officers would at times get involved in mundane incidents, handcuffing students and leading them away. The discretionary powers of parole officers were invoked by administrators and parents. Students not only regularly received lengthy out-of-school suspensions, but would also spend time in juvenile detention.

All of this was brought home to me after I left Chicago and began volunteering downstate at an adult prison, where in 2016 I encountered and spoke with a former student with whom I had worked in the high school, and who was incarcerated in the facility. He knew I was visiting the prison, and stopped by the education building while I was there to say hello. I was glad to see him, since I wasn’t in touch with many former students, but simultaneously shocked and saddened to see him wearing prison blues. I was able to briefly talk with him once more at the prison, a few months later; on the date he was being released. As he was already completing his

second sentence at a young age, my relief was uncertain, hoping he would not return. But it should go without saying that the experiences of my former student and his loved ones were far more profound than my secondhand feelings.

On this point, however, White people’s feelings and intentions often have outsized consequences on People of Color (Sullivan, 2017). The White art teacher I replaced at my high school was said to have wept at the end of every school day. Near the end of her tenure, this teacher pressed assault charges against a Black student who cut off a lock of the teacher’s hair. As the new teacher hired to replace her, I also dealt with feelings of frustration, humiliation, guilt, and anger. On the occasions when I reported infractions to parents or administrators, I too played a regrettable role in the consequences my students received at school and at home.

The downstream effects of White emotions were also keenly felt in my volunteer work at the prison. There I saw that primarily White prison officials would regularly revoke individual clearance and occasionally suspend all on-site educational and rehabilitation programming based on suspicions of romantic feelings between incarcerated men (nearly all BIPOC) and women volunteers (nearly all White). For me, this experience hearkened back to a long history of violent White panic around the corruption of White women (Wells, 2014).

These experiences of encountering White people’s fear and disgust were not limited to institutional settings in which BIPOC populations were explicitly managed and contained. In the segregated college town where I moved after leaving Chicago, I saw the suspicious reactions of White neighbors to Black residents of nearby housing-voucher apartment complexes. I then moved to a position at a predominantly White university, where I encountered indifference and skepticism towards persistent racism, and where BIPOC students reported frequent acts of racial insensitivity from White students and faculty. I have seen a range of diversity initiatives in higher education, which sometimes value the important work of educating White people on campus, enhancing their public relations all the while, but also tend to overlook the experiences and circumstances of BIPOC community members (Kraehe, 2015; Ritter & Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2020a; 2020b). All of these experiences bring to mind a phrase widely broadcast on social media in the wake of Black teenager Michael Brown’s 2014 death at the hands of Darren Wilson, a scared White police officer: Black lives > White feelings. But it is often the case that when White feelings are weighed against Black lives, the intensity of the former is allowed to overshadow the value of the latter.

**School and Prison: Separated at Birth?**

Many Black and Latinx schools in low-income areas have metal detectors at every entrance, police officers on duty in the school, and security guards stationed throughout the building (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Ayers, et al. 2001; Laura, 2014; Na & Gottfriedson, 2011; Reyes, 2006; Shedd, 2015). As history has shown, this state of affairs can’t be separated from the visual media created and discussed in art classes. As David Wallace Adams (1995) demonstrates, the mission of the first White-administered schools for Black and Indigenous young people was to educationally uplift children of allegedly uncivilized origins, and this was partly to be achieved through employing round-the-clock surveillance and harsh physical punishment. Instructional programs in art and industrial
drafting played a significant role in both enacting and documenting this purported transformation (Lentis, 2018; Wexler, 1992). These schools evoke early penitentiaries (i.e., sites of penance) in Europe and the U.S. that claimed to offer moral rehabilitation with an emphasis on visual supervision (Foucault, 1977). The rise of harsh school punishment has been linked to high-stakes testing regimes and the deskilling of teachers (Advancement Project, 2010), and I would speculate that these factors have contributed to the formal and informal standardization of arts curricula in public schools that have inherited the civilizing mission.

Pioneering Black educator Carter G. Woodson (1933/2005) argued that instilling a sense of deficiency among Black students was the primary goal of White-run schools following the Civil War. Woodson cites, among a great many other erasures, the exclusion of African-descended artists from the history of classical art, noting that: “In the teaching of fine arts these instructors… omitted the African influence which scientists now regard as significant and dominant in early Hellas” (p. 33). Visual arts education in and beyond the U.S. has a long history of centering White cultural artifacts and promoting violent distortions of groups deemed external to a Western aesthetic canon (O’Rourke, 2018; Ozment, 2018; Sammond, 2015; Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2018). This legacy of marginalization and exoticized representations continues into the present, when even art lessons that include subjective experiences and token BIPOC artifacts tend to avoid larger structural questions. (Acuff, 2014; Kraehe, 2015; Lawton, 2018). In a wider sense, the continuing art education fixation on European and settler artists and techniques could be seen as a minor but not insignificant contributing factor to a widespread hardening of racialized affect (Ahmed, 2004), manifested most visibly in a racialized expansion of school policies promoting punishment and control.

In recent decades, state punishment has become central to life in lower-income communities of color. The 1990s experienced the introduction of zero tolerance school discipline policies and school-based police officers, as well as the expansion and intensification of the U.S. criminal punishment system, a boom chronicled by numerous authors (Abramsky, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Gottschalk, 2006; Herivel & Wright, 2003; James, 2007; Kilgore, 2015; Mauer, 2006; McShane, 2008; Parenti, 2000; Puryear, 2013; Raphael & Stoll, 2013; Richie, 2012; Useem & Piehl, 2008; Wacquant, 2009). In keeping with the analysis of the school-to-prison pipeline, it is easy to see similarities in the ways in which Black and Latinx people receive disproportionately severe disciplinary sanctions as both students and defendants. This disparity pertains not only to their presence in the general population, but in regard to the same infractions (Ferguson, 2000; Heitzeg, 2009; Huang, 2016; Kim, 2012; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Morris, 2016; Rios, 2011; Skiba et al., 2010; Weissman, 2014).

I will not deny that, from my perspective, the social atmosphere of the high school where I taught was sometimes fraught with aggression, and I did worry at times about the emotional and physical safety of my students. The institutional response, however, is my primary concern here. In my tenure as a high school art teacher, several initiatives were attempted to deputize teachers as hall monitors, and in-school punishments were constantly being introduced and revised for infractions like tardiness to class, dress code issues, and unsanctioned cell phone
use. Students received long suspensions not only for the occasional fight, but also for more commonplace acts of defiance, threats, and vandalism.

Ever since education began being used to assimilate BIPOC populations in the U.S., White commentators have lamented that communities of color reject educational opportunities and rules of social conduct (Feldman, 2004; Ferber, 1998; McRae, 2018; Pick, 1989; Stoddard, 1923). Lothrop Stoddard in his debate with W.E.B. DuBois (Taylor, 1981), and William F. Buckley in his debate with James Baldwin (Buccola, 2019), offer two among many examples in which conservative White intellectuals have rationalized social disadvantage through narratives of personal responsibility. The most famous liberal variation on this argument may be Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s infamous 1965 report for the U.S. Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for Action*. Throughout this document, known widely as “The Moynihan Report,” the unequal historical success of African-Americans is framed by a context of “injustice,” but ultimately blamed on an epidemic of pathological “disorganization” within the Black family, exemplified by one-parent female-headed households.

Such falsely compassionate rhetoric is used to explain the ways that institutions, schools chief among them, operate dissimilarly in different areas of a segregated city like Chicago. As in the aforementioned examples, White people express the paternalistic view that people of color are like children who cannot appreciate what they are given, nor be trusted to look after themselves. And so, Black and Latinx people face the additional burden that White people are largely unable to recognize their own oppressive roles (Meiners, 2007). Within increasing BIPOC populations within public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), much of the overwhelmingly White faculty and staff (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) appear to have internalized a zero-tolerance attitude towards all students, regardless of race. While racial attitudes are at the origin of harsh disciplinary policies (Kafka, 2011), and racialized groups still bear the brunt of them (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018), it is common for White officials and teachers to claim that such policies are applied universally, and are thus not racially biased. Michelle Alexander (2010), among others (Han, 2015; López, 2006; Wise, 2010), has noted such a colorblind dynamic in America’s historically and globally unique explosion of jails and prisons, which, while they incarcerate disproportionate numbers of Black and Brown people, are still punishing more White people than members of any other individual racial group (Nellis, 2016). In prisons and schools, the desire to punish is racialized, and the suffering of low-income White communities becomes collateral damage. The degree to which such a zero-tolerance viewpoint has taken hold among art teachers can be seen in a social-media event from fall 2019 that I elaborate on in the next section.

**The Art of Retribution**

As of September 28, 2019, there were 19,344 members in the Facebook group “Art Teachers.” A post from September 25 had garnered 422 comments by the evening of the 28th, a total that would eventually reach 455. Hundreds of distinct people posted comments. The original post was from someone who appeared to be a White male art teacher, who was punched by a student, whose race was not mentioned, when the teacher was breaking up a fight in the school hallway. The teacher was seeking the group’s feedback on whether or not to press charges.
While the notion of restorative justice did receive an occasional mention, nearly all of the commenters, a group that appeared to consist almost entirely of White art teachers, a large majority of whom seemed to be women, encouraged the original poster to press charges against the student.

The rationales offered by commenting art teachers varied in tone. “The real world is a tough place.” “Violence is only getting worse, not better; if we continue to muffle and conceal.” “Fuck any kid who hits a teacher. What’s next? A parent? A cop?” “Unfortunately, he choose his path of violence not once but twice to physically assault two people in that fight. (sic)” “There was a distinct pedagogical inflection to many of the comments. “The biggest injustice we are doing these kids is protecting them from the consequences of their shitty choices.” “It won’t go him any favours if he sees he can act this way and get away with it. (sic)” “Press charges or they will never learn!” “You’re doing him no favors by letting it go.” “Press charges and know that you are setting up this child to learn a life lesson.” Some commenters framed punishment as benevolence, as in this remark: “…you can show grace by walking with him through the consequences.” Some opted for melodrama: “Please know that your decision may save someone else’s life.” And, in another exemplary comment, a purportedly ethical stance thinly veils an expression of outright contempt for the community served by a school. “I worked in a small district that didn’t press charges and most of those kids ended up in jail regardless. They wanted to ‘help’ them by never holding them responsible for their actions and all they did was create a community of jail birds, welfare recipients and drug addicts.” Though the original poster at one point expressed gratitude for those who showed him grace when he was growing up, the bulk of commenters repeated the refrain: “Press charges.”

I contributed to the conversation as well. I noted the racialized character of this emphasis on legal punishment, in which a student, whom the original poster stated had recently turned 16, was being treated by many commenters as if he were an adult, both destined to and deserving of a lifetime of incarceration. And I forthrightly stated my view that the police do not and cannot solve interpersonal conflicts. This is a broad generalization, but it is a less untenable claim, in my opinion, than the repeated and uninformed assumption that a student who hits a teacher while fighting another student, and then fails to immediately apologize, is irredeemably dangerous and thus disposable. To me, this idea of permanent and unsalvageable savagery evokes the myth of inner-city unrest and chaos which drove White flight in the mid- and latter twentieth century (Gordon, 2008; Schneider, 2008; Thompson, 1999), and which resulted in the political and economic abandonment of the neighborhood where I taught.

In Chicago I was threatened on rare occasions by students, and over the years I have experienced a degree of secondhand trauma from violence I witnessed and heard about. In no way do I consider violence a trivial matter. I am certain that a number of my students experienced more frequent and severe physical violence than I did as a child. But I didn’t care to review my own history on the Facebook thread, as I have done in this article, owing to my doubts about social media as a forum for sustained engagement with sensitive topics. My main concern in writing about this exchange is not with winning the argument, but is rather with the pedagogical and uniquely American insistence on
a vague combination of retribution and rehabilitation as a viable stand-in for accountability and restitution (Kaba, 2021).

Given how little information the original post contained, with little more added later, the clamor for punishment is noteworthy if unsurprising. What I saw on the thread was a disparity between violence experienced as an isolated event versus violence experienced as a permanent feature of the environment, or between the violence someone spontaneously encounters versus the unseen and ongoing violence undertaken on that person’s behalf. Needless to say, these forms of sustained and intergenerational violence were not mentioned on the thread. It is ironic to recall the conventional notion that art class offers a space in school that is forgiving and free of judgment. But the emphasis on arrest and incarceration as a positive learning experience is perhaps the most salient aspect of this thread. For well over a century, the paternalism of the U.S. juvenile justice system has echoed the prevalent presumption of superior wisdom among the White educational philanthropists, policymakers, and administrators who assume control of, but not responsibility for, masses of poor and BIPOC children (Watkins, 2001).

**Parting Shots**

The phenomenon of White people unleashing violence against (primarily) Black people, on seemingly any pretext at all, has a long and tragic history, continuing well past the end of legalized slavery. From 1877 to 1950, nearly 4,000 African-Americans were lynched in the U.S., averaging more than one murder per week for 73 years (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). Perhaps the most publicized lynching in U.S. history occurred when a Black 14-year-old boy, Emmett Till, was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly grabbing and harassing a White woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, who recanted her accusation over 60 years later (Pérez-Peña, 2017). Till’s death, which helped to launch the 1960s civil rights movement, followed a pattern of lynchings prompted by baseless accusations of Black men and boys sexually harassing or assaulting White women (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017).

A pattern continues to this day wherein White citizens and police officers react with disproportionate violence to perceived threats to the racialized social order. Frivolous calls by Whites to police in regard to Black people’s everyday behavior has become a regular occurrence (Fleischer, 2020; Hutchinson, 2018; McNamara, 2019), and majority-BIPOC K-12 schools with on-site police officers have long been settings for displays of severe punishment and excessive force (Adams & Richardson, 2021; The Advancement Project & The Alliance for Educational Justice, 2018; American Civil Liberties Union, 2003; Brown, 2015; Justice Policy Institute, 2020; Kamenetz, 2020; Lee, 2015; Pinkerton, 2015; Ryan, et al., 2018; Shaver & Decker, 2017; Work, 2021). The assumption of authority among White Americans puts pressure on the justice system to sustain a feeling of safety and comfort for White people, at the material and physical expense of poor and BIPOC families. On the Facebook thread I witnessed, one teacher’s understandable and sympathetic experience of humiliation, rage, and temporary physical pain was considered, among an audience of largely White teachers, exchangeable for the freedom, opportunities, and safety of a young person dropped into the criminal justice system. While this Facebook thread is very far from a lynching, to me it still offers a textbook example of the overvaluation of White feelings.

There’s no reason to expect that the most enlightened school discipline policy will overcome the weighty traumas of historic and contemporary racial violence, let alone the efforts of the best-intentioned individual art teacher. With that being said, I do hope to convince art teachers reading this that their actions regarding discipline do have a very real impact on the lives of young people. Teachers, individually and collectively, can work to change the disciplinary culture of their institutions. One way to do this is by making instruction as meaningful, relevant, and engaging as possible, and for every teacher to integrate their classroom a management approach that is aligned with their teaching philosophy. In other words, there is a need for many of us to move past an art pedagogy of qualified inclusion and tokenized representation, and to incorporate what we teach into how we teach. Speaking for myself, I did include critical projects on policing and prisons in my own art teaching, but at the same time always struggled (and sometimes failed) to perform some elusive form of classroom management that would allow my students to feel relatively relaxed and safe. Put simply, I want to resist the colorblind presumption that any public space in the U.S. can be racially sanitized, purged of all historical conflict.

For this reason, I don’t think a handy list of tips and takeaways is the proper response to the ubiquity and weight of the problem under discussion. Making occasional gestures in the art classroom toward multicultural education (Acuff, 2014) or culturally responsive pedagogy (Lee, 2012) is not as comprehensive and meaningful an approach as incorporating ideas and knowledge of teaching learned from BIPOC communities (Ballengee-Morris & Staikidis, 2017; Rickford 2016), embracing anti-racism (Rolling, 2020), and drawing on approaches rooted in police and prison abolitionism for leading and managing our classrooms and schools (Abolitionist Teaching Network, n.d.; Kaepernick, 2021; Project NIA, n.d.; Shalaby, 2020). Enacting an abolitionist and anti-racist pedagogy, within which an abolitionist and anti-racist disciplinary philosophy is a crucial element, will be a process that varies from teacher to teacher, classroom to classroom, school to school, community to community. It involves being frank about White people’s abuse of power, but more than this, it involves decentering that Whiteness (Carter Andrews et al., 2021), in order to learn from historical narratives that have been suppressed. For White teachers in particular it can involve personal reflection on our social roles (Spillane, 2018), but also involves getting outside of ourselves, and becoming curious about the places where we teach, and about the people we are serving. Listening to students and their caregivers is vital. And, in light of what we learn as White art teachers, it requires getting over ourselves. This means understanding that our feelings matter a great deal less than the lives of the young people we have taken it upon ourselves to care for.
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Critical Hermeneutics
and Counter-Narratives of Ledger Art

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Too often historical artworks in schools, textbooks, cultural institutions, and public spaces share a narrative that bolsters white-centered histories, but when an historical artwork is studied as text it creates room for multiple perspectives (Newfield, 2011), expanding the narrative to include subjugated histories. Looking at art through the philosophy of hermeneutics opens up questions and conflicts that arise within texts based on interpretations of those texts (Leonardo, 2003). This paper will apply the philosophy of hermeneutics to critique historical memory, and it will present ledger art as a visual text and counter-narrative to dominant white narratives. Ledger art emerged as an art form in the 19th century when Union troops traded accounting books with the Plains Indians. The storytelling aspects of contemporary ledger art provide opportunities for counter-narratives and ongoing acts of critical resistance. By engaging in inquiry and discourse with ledger art in the classroom, students learn to recognize how power structures attempt to erase contemporary Indigenous experiences and how ledger art can serve as a narrative and an ongoing act of critical resistance.

Keywords: critical hermeneutics, ledger art, counter-narrative, oral tradition, arts-based inquiry

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The exhibition *Making American Taste: Narrative Art for a New Democracy* debuted at the New-York Historical Society in 2011, where, at the time, I worked as an educator. One of the paintings on view, titled, *The Last of the Race*, painted in 1847 by Tomkins Harrison Matteson, shows a family of five dressed in blankets, moccasins and the patriarch adorned in a feathered headdress, all indications that they are Indigenous to North America. They are huddled on a rock overlooking an ocean, and the man is looking out into the vastness of the horizon. The figures to his right face away from the water, one looking down with head resting on hands, and the other warily looking around. When leading school groups, I was instructed to ask students about the geography of the painting, where might these people be in the United States? Why is the father looking out into the distance but all we see is water? Why is the painting titled *The Last of the Race*? The questions that were not suggested as part of the education curriculum were: What was happening in the United States the year this was painted? How might the artist situate himself in regard to the people he painted? The exhibition title suggests that the paintings on view tell a story of what was considered American and what was considered tasteful art. What story is Matteson telling us through his depiction of this Indigenous family?

Artwork can be a form of literacy (Newfield, 2011). The language it speaks and the questions we ask of it can determine how moments, events, cultures, and peoples are regarded and remembered. Hermeneutics is a philosophy that looks specifically at questions that arise within texts and what conflicts occur within those texts based on interpretations (Leonardo, 2003). The texts we study and how we study them have far-reaching implications.

*The Last of the Race* is one example of visual text with multiple interpretations, and it speaks to a larger narrative, how the United States depicts its Native history. I am concerned with what histories have been excluded from the story of the United States, especially the continued silencing of Indigenous peoples and what these omissions say about existing power structures and the language of white dominance. Contemporary Indigenous art serves as evidence of how United States power structures have perpetuated a misleading narrative of Native history. Contemporary ledger art is rooted in the past tradition of creating works on papers from old ledger books. These books were acquired by Plains Indians when Union troops stationed in the region used them as trade items. Artists, such as John Isaiah Pepion and Dolores Purdy, tell stories of resistance, resilience, and relevance through art pieces created using imagery from the present on historical texts, evidence that Native peoples are still here (Linn, 2016). This paper applies the philosophy of hermeneutics to critique historical memory by looking at how visual and written language has been used as a tool to maintain power structures that have attempted to erase contemporary Native stories, and it will contemplate how ledger art acts as a counter-narrative and an ongoing act of critical resistance.

**On Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is a philosophy that reflects upon the many variables of communication and meaning and is shaped by the contexts and writers who apply it. It has its origins in biblical scholarship (Kelley, 2015) because of the myriad interpretations the Bible inspires and a need to create a foundation for its teachings. Davey (2017) explained the study of hermeneutics as ongoing because understanding is ongoing.
therefore, the study of hermeneutics is infinite. Hermeneutics considers authorship (Foucault, 1977), ideology (Leonardo, 2003), history, and culture (Roberge, 2011). A new perspective on the philosophy emerged in the twentieth century, with Heidegger and Gadamer using it to critique contemporary socio-political issues (Kelley, 2015). This relationship became central to how critical hermeneutics is used because it has the potential to find meaning between what is said and what is meant (Davey, 2017). Ricoeur, another important figure in modern hermeneutics, approached the philosophy through the distance, or conflict, between subject and object (Leonardo, 2003). This path of interpretation led Ricoeur to pursue the study of ideology as hermeneutics intrinsically bound to identity and culture (Roberge, 2011). This aspect of hermeneutics is especially important to consider when one culture seeks to overpower another, as if erasing it from the history books.

Paul Ricoeur on Ideologies and Interpretations

Ideologies are interpretations of history and culture, and they are authored; all factors that contribute to meaning making (Roberge, 2011). In other words, ideologies are designed through several interpretive factors. Since each of these influences are text based, ideology can also be understood as text. Ricoeur felt ideologies have the potential to shift when they are critically examined because historical narratives and cultures shift as our understandings of them evolve. For this reason, Ricoeur saw “text as a fulcrum between history and the author” (Leonardo, 2003, p. 331), between events as they happened and events as they have been documented. This could be interpreted as problematic when viewed through critical hermeneutics. The United States was founded on a series of defining texts, described as such because of how they shaped the ideologies of the country. The U.S Declaration of Independence (US 1776) is a call to arms for independence from Britain’s colonial rule. The United States Constitution provides the laws of the country, and the Bill of Rights are the laws of the people. Ricoeur believed in language as a transformative tool (Kearney, 1988), and the language of these documents continue to shape the American narrative through their political and social influences. These documents have also been used as suppressive and oppressive tools, especially because of how they have been appropriated to push American ideologies into a largely Eurocentric mold of whiteness. Ricoeur refers to this as “a history taught, a history learned, but also a history celebrated” (Ricoeur, 2004/2006, p. 85). The histories presented in these founding documents also represent violence and oppression as, he suggests, most founding histories are achieved. The Preamble of the Declaration of Independence (US 1776, paragraph 2) is used to promote the promises of democracy as being free and equal. When we look at this document that celebrates the birth of democracy using critical hermeneutics, another perspective is revealed, one that proves intolerance and justification of the erasure of a people.

Critical Hermeneutics and Re-interpreting the Declaration of Independence

The United States celebrates Independence Day every year to commemorate the day the Declaration of Independence (US 1776) was signed. It is the de-facto founding document. The Preamble of this historic document is cited widely, specifically the lines, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created
equal, that they are endowed by their Creator
with certain unalienable Rights, that among these
are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of
Happiness.” (paragraph 2). These words
encapsulate American ideologies of freedom,
individualism, equality, and self-government, and
as remembrance allows the dominant narrative
to maintain its status (Ricoeur, 2004/2006).
When this ideology is challenged, power
structures ensure this historical narrative is
upheld. Vattimo and Zabala (2011) wrote about
framed democracy, a way of looking at history as
complete, its writings and interpretations final.
The inevitability of the construction of framed
democracy is use of force for those in power to
remain dominant. Yet, buried at the bottom of 27
grievances that follow the preamble of the U.S
Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote,
“He has excited domestic insurrections amongst
us, and has endeavoured to bring on the
inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian
Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an
undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and
conditions (sic).” (US 1776, paragraph 29) Both
statements exist in the same document, yet only
one of them is ubiquitous in American ideology.
War and military skirmishes are rationalized
because of framed democracy (Vattimo &
Zabala, 2011), such as Jefferson’s statement
about the “merciless Indian Savages”. Using
critical hermeneutics, we begin to see how the
language in the Preamble has been used to
uphold the white dominant narrative and that
the omission of Indigenous narratives is part of a
larger intention to subjugate their lives and
cultures.

The ideas espoused in the Declaration of
Independence (US 1776) have been repeated so
many times they have taken the form of fact.
Critical hermeneutics looks at these seemingly
universal truths in this founding document and
questions authorship, context, and outcome
(Leonardo, 2003). Art and arts-based inquiry
provides opportunities to challenge power
structures (Newfield, 2011) through discourse
and varied perspectives. When the 27th
grievance is considered in relationship to the
painting The Last of the Race, a narrative pattern
of erasure emerges.

**Critical Hermeneutics and Visual
Literacy**

Kögler (Rapko, 1998) believes that dialogue
enables the potential for critical ideas. With this
in mind, I revisit The Last of the Race and address
how art, as a visual language, can be supported
by critical hermeneutics. When reflecting on my
time as a museum educator, I applied little critical
discourse to the Matteson painting. Visual critical
literacy requires me to look at what is not readily
available, wonder why certain elements have
been left out, and consider how these omissions
reflect dominant power structures (Newfield,
2011). I thought I should invite students to
consider the artist’s role in developing the scene
and the implications of the title, with questions
like: How does this painting contribute to 19th
century notions of the vanishing Indian, such as
James Fenimore Cooper’s novel The Last of the
Mohicans, published in 1826? These depictions
controlled the narrative for white Americans,
proclaiming erased cultures and peoples (Hurst
Thomas, 2001). Newfield refers to a critical
interpretation as reading against the text.
Artwork of unidentified Native peoples created
by a white artist in the 19th century that hangs in
the oldest museum in New York City with a 20
dollar admission is weighed down by
assumptions around dominant cultural narratives.
Communication against the painting’s more overt
implications open up discourse around colonial violence and Native resistance.

The Relationship Between Art and Critical Hermeneutics

Pairing the Preamble and the 27th grievance from the Declaration of Independence with The Last of the Race creates potential for an expansive discourse during which the audience is engaging with the events of the past and considering present interpretations of these events. Approaches could address the relationship between the artist and his subjects and whether a painting such as this is a primary or secondary source document. Applying critical hermeneutics to an historical painting and document may also reveal an unspoken intentionality where the subject is subjugated by the artist or author and power imbalances emerge (Maitland, 2019). How does the painting connect with the Preamble, especially the lines that claim “all men are created equal”? How do the subjects in the painting fit into Jefferson’s description of the “merciless Indian savages”?

“Hermeneutics neither privatizes nor co-opts the Other’s experience. It recognizes a small window of opportunity where two worlds do not necessarily agree but can mutually co-exist through the pane/pain of difference” (Leonardo, p. 340). A hermeneutic approach to interpretation does assume a mutual understanding but does not force a totally new interpretation. Art, like text, is interpretive, and it is made richer and more expansive by those

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Figure 1

Artist Unknown (1874). “A heavy battle in which more whites than Indians killed. Soldiers in hole.” Image permission granted by Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin.
who dialogue with it. A new understanding should emerge, organically, through the many perspectives to consider. Applying a critical hermeneutical lens to visual literacy diminishes the existing, dominant interpretation that keeps Native arts, culture, and lived experiences stuck in that historical telling. If we take these ideas further, by using contemporary Native ledger art practices in comparison with their historical counterpart, a complex and multi-faceted ongoing narrative reveals itself.

**Ledger Art: Moving Through Native History**

Colonialism attempted to destroy Indigenous ontologies, including languages. Though this mission was successful in many ways, Native artists and authors subvert American writing styles by incorporating Indigenous thought into their works (Low, 2006). The English language does not communicate the totality of Native ideas, so language must be played with and reimagined. Ledger art is one such vehicle to assert Indigenous voices. Based in the ancient language of glyphs, the signs and symbols of ledger art are to be read and interpreted as language. The imagery originated on bark and animals hides. In 2016, the National Museum of the American Indian in Manhattan hosted an exhibition called *Unbound: Narrative Art of the Plains*, which was my initiation into the genre of ledger art. Art from the post-Civil War and Westward Expansion/Invasion era was displayed in context with contemporary ledger artists. The older pieces, created in nineteenth century ledger books Indigenous peoples possessed through trade (Low, 2006), displayed battles where the Union Army succumbed to the Plains nations (Brown, 2007). Unlike the imagery of *The Last of the Race*, the contemporary pieces in the exhibition totally upended notions of the dying warrior of the past. Though they were also painted onto ledger paper, the vibrant images showed women carrying umbrellas and men on horseback making cell phone calls, as if exclaiming, “We are still here” (Linn, 2016). Low (2006), who is Cheyenne from Kansas, refers to ledger art as “vehicles of continuity” (p. 84), and they are primary source documents created by the people in and of the time period they are presenting, which makes them valuable historical texts as well as narrative artworks. When interpreted through critical hermeneutics, the art pieces relate to events and aspects of life rarely looked at in education settings. Ledger art emerged when Native lives were being transferred from independence to enclosed, fixed, and dependent, a time when Native culture was being erased by land seizures, massacres, and industrial boarding schools (Churchill, 2004). A work like the narrative from 1874 (Figure 1) becomes an essential counter-narrative to the history told and taught by dominant white institutions.

**Critical Hermeneutics Applied to Ledger Art**

Low (2006) explains the types of narratives ledger artists communicate in their imagery and in the text. She cites military confrontations, such as battles, skirmishes, and horse stealing to the more mundane social aspects of an Indian way of life under threat of extinction. In this section, I will use Low’s writing to present the utility and storytelling of ledger art without inserting a personal interpretation of what I think the pieces mean. My voice represents the dominant white culture and has been heard too often when interpreting Indigenous stories. Indigenous nations are reclaiming their stories through decolonizing practices. Their voices should be centered in their storytelling, not mine (Lonetree,
To look at these narratives critically, we must identify our subjectivities through gender identity, class, and race because of how these factors are embedded in any interpretation (Leonardo, 2003). Ricoeur referred to these interpretive biases as the ‘anticipatory structure of understanding’” (Ricoeur as cited in Leonardo, p. 333). I will present the contents of the artwork and explain, through Low's writing and accompanying text, the relevance of these pieces to how art may be read as text. Then, by considering the artwork as text, re-examine it through critical hermeneutics.

**Ledger Art as a Counter-Narrative to Whitewashed US History**

Moving through the artwork chronologically, the drawing in Figure 1 includes text that reads, “A heavy battle in which more white than Indians killed. Soldiers in hole” and “Fight where half Indians killed.” We see felled and cornered Union troops outnumbered and appearing to fight defensively. In a loose circle around the paper Indigenous men are on foot and on horseback, and their bodies are positioned towards the center of the paper. I am basing my identification of whom is Indigenous and who is a United States soldier based on the clothing each group is wearing. A limited interpretation might look at the positioning of the people and the evidence of violence and apply the label of “merciless Indian savages,” but this assumption is a dominant perspective, not a critical one.

Western thought has mandated interpretation to come from the top down, through experts at established institutions, such as universities, museums, law, and sciences (Campbell, 2012); therefore, interpretation is thought of as truth - not one aspect of what is, but the totality of it, leaving no room for difference. Critical hermeneutics pushes against this notion. What is not known, and what becomes essential to the hermeneutic application is looking for what is not in the image. Low (2006) asserts the idea that “Each drawing in a ledger book is such an increment, the accumulation of moments in a multidimensional sequence. Stories remain suspended” (p. 96).

Ledger art follows the oral history tradition, one that is passed along generations and tells an overall story. The images are fragments or pieces of a larger story, not literal retellings. The artist of Figure 1 provided text that offers some concrete information, but the specifics of this 1874 encounter are unknown. The accompanying text from the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, where this piece is archived, asserts the United States soldiers rarely fought defensively, so this scene is an unlikely reality. These are some aspects of what is known about the drawing and how it has been documented without challenging its narrative. To look at this work critically, biases must be acknowledged before looking into alternative messaging. The starting point for deconstructing the existing interpretation may be the interpretation itself. In other words, asking questions of the text creates possibilities because the questions raised work against the text. The text here applies to the drawing, the writing on the drawing, and the historian’s interpretation and how it situates itself historically. An exploration based on Low’s (2006) critique of ledger art as text might ask why the artist chose to document this moment, not the moment before or the moment after. Did the artist bear witness to the scene or learn of it as a story passed down from another source? What materials did the artist use and how might the materials contribute to the narrative of relationships between Plains Indians and United States military? In keeping with the
oral history tradition, what might the artist want to communicate to future generations? It is also important to challenge the Texas historian’s statement regarding the soldiers’ position in the drawing, such as how would he or she situate him or herself in the interpretation that claims soldiers rarely fought defensively. That statement communicates something about dominance and re-centers the narrative onto the white soldiers, making them seem too powerful to have found themselves in such a position. The fact that this drawing does depict a victory for the Native men in the scene addresses Low’s claim of ledger art being a part of Indigenous historical accounts carried over from the oral tradition.

Contemporary ledger art is the evidence of a rich, complicated, creative, thriving history, one that is still being written.

Dolores Purdy’s painting (Figure 2) titled *The Road to Indian Market is Filled with Potholes* shows three blue, older model pick-up trucks splotched with greens and reds that may indicate rust and decay. Only two truck beds are visible, and both hold, what might be considered traditional Native artifacts. The history of the paper on which Purdy created this piece becomes a part of the narrative. We can only see three digits to indicate the paper is from the last decade of the 19th century. This clue means this artwork can teach us about the past, much like a material or textual artifact might teach us about the time in which it was created. Purdy, who is from the Caddo Nation, upends 19th century depictions of the vanishing Indian by positioning her characters in trucks. Educators might ask why Purdy chose trucks accented with rust and why the road is “filled with potholes.” What might the potholes symbolize? Despite the potholes and rust, the trucks are still moving.

Low (2006) writes about how to read ledger art - the action flows from right to left - as shown in both works. In Purdy’s painting, the trucks drive into the scene. This may make the audience wonder where the truck was before it entered the page and where it is going, supporting the notion of ledger art as a moment in an ongoing narrative. What is apparent is the driver of the truck is dressed differently from the men in the drawing from 1874 in Figure 1. All three drivers have long, straight, dark hair blowing through the open windows, and they are each wearing distinctive wide-brimmed hats. The truck beds are loaded with items, and a few have fallen out of one truck’s bed. Based on the title, the drivers appear to be on their way to a market. This would leave me to believe they are going to sell these items. Another interpretation might suggest these are the same truck and driver depicted over time going to the market.

All of these indicators tell a story, but it is important to allow for the medium to speak and for the audience to ask questions of it, as opposed to imposing their interpretations. Low speaks of Indigenous authorship as different from storytelling in Western literature. Ledger art narratives are intertwined with oral histories, traditions, and communities: “the drawings served as a mnemonic device; explicit features were not needed since they would be described in the detailed narrative” (Horse Capture & Horse Capture, 2001, p. 21). This is true of the two examples, and becomes even more noticeable in John Isaiah Pepion’s work (Figure 3).

Ledger art reveals scenes from people’s lives. In the past, the stories dealt with warring with United States’ military over land rights. Contemporary ledger art scenes depict lived experiences, showing Indigenous peoples in trucks instead of on horseback about to sell their
handmade goods instead of trading them, and the title of the work provide much of the insight.

Deconstructing the scene in Figure 2 may involve us asking if these items are for sale, and who might be buying them. What do the trucks tell us about the sellers or the artist? Why is each truck close to identical in make and model, and from where are they driving? This drawing is especially interesting as a counter-narrative to 19th century portrayals of Indigenous lives because of the independence these drivers display. Artworks like The Last of the Race depict a dying people, but these Indians are in trucks not on foot or on horseback. They will make money selling goods unique to their cultures, a sovereign people. Derrida revealed how the line of inquiry one chooses reveals the desired truth, and that truth, once reached, is fixed (Campbell, 2016). This is why students should engage in discourse and inquiry with the artwork. Who will buy these pieces? Will potential buyers devalue the labor by haggling, exploiting the sellers’ need to sell? Will the pieces be on display in a mansion where they will become exoticized? The narrative continues well after the market and can be pulled in so many directions. What truths will students reveal when in dialogue with the artwork? Contemporary ledger art may also deal with socio-political issues of the day, which, as a

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result of colonialism, are many. One example of this offers insight into how the system of mass incarceration is affecting Native lives.

A terrifying statistic published by the Roosevelt Institute at Cornell shows that Native men under the age of 25 make up 70% of incarcerated youth in federal-run prisons, making them all the more vulnerable to be incarcerated in adult prisons (Native Lives Matter, 2015). Holding On: Women are the Backbone (Figure 3) by John Isaiah Pepion directly confronts this issue by painting on paper with a heading that reads “United States Penitentiary”. Centered on the paper is a woman with no facial features; she may be intentionally anonymous or ubiquitous, leaving possibility for past and future narrations. It looks like the subject is holding a photograph of a man standing behind prison bars. The subtitle to the painting reads, “Always holding us up. Holding our pictures while we are imprisoned. Will we ever be free?” Pepion has shared an image of continuity, like the previous two examples, but the continuity is not in the movement, nor in the implied question of what happens next in the scene, but in a continuous cycle of systemic oppression. The woman may be faceless because of shame, or, as mentioned before, to allow the story to evolve with each telling. I wonder if the lack of features are symbolical of how widespread the problem of Indigenous incarceration is but how little it is addressed in larger conversations about mass incarceration. Pepion asks a question within the work’s title: “Will we ever be free?” This question circles back to Thomas Jefferson and the shaping of American ideologies. “Naming the specifics of the difficult history of U.S.-Indian relations, Native people and communities can begin to frame their history within the context of colonization” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 125). As I established earlier, European descendants wrote the story of the United States through their experiences as colonizers and with an ideology of white European supremacy. A critical

**Figure 3**
John Isaiah Pepion, (2020). Holding On: Women are the Backbone. Image included with permission of the artist.
interpretation of Pepion’s painting would consider this legacy as part of its continual narrative. What happened historically to Native men to cause mass incarceration in the present day? What would need to happen to imagine a different future? When I read the title of the painting and think about the moments in this undistinguishable woman’s life that have led to this one moment Pepion expresses, I wonder if the artist chose to leave her face blank because the ideologies and practices of the United States continue to render Native women as invisible.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary Native art is rewriting the dominant white historical narrative by challenging depictions of bygone eras, such as in The Last of the Race, by centering themselves in contemporary life. Ledger art claims space through specific visual and written texts that show movement from the past through the present and into undetermined futures. Contemporary ledger artists use the historical medium to invert notions of erasure while also keeping with the historical practice of oral storytelling traditions. When critically examined as text, depth of meaning begins to emerge.

This is why critical hermeneutics provides an important contribution to how we read ledger art as text and consider what it might teach us about the past and present. Challenging what we think we know through inquiry and discourse allows for multiple interpretations to reveal new meanings, confronting previous ideas of historical content as factual and finite and creating space for inclusive futures. The discourse that emerges from art-based inquiry expands epistemologies and leads us towards reaching mutual understandings.

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Typographic interventions often incorporate multi-faceted textual renderings that are deeply intertwined with the communities they inhabit. These works are sometimes antagonistic social actions that express grievance and take a critical position.

**Typographic Interventions:** Disruptive Letterforms in Public Space

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We are surrounded by typography—on billboards, aluminum cans, pill bottles, and pixelated screens—but artists and art teachers, seeking out the materiality of their lived environments, should be able to look at text in different ways. Many artists utilize letterforms as a medium of juxtaposition and recontextualization (Gude, 2004) by placing text in places we don’t expect to see it, or they subvert the messages we expect to read. Typographic interventions can be seen everywhere, by all types of artists, makers, activists, and dissidents. These interruptions could be framed as forms of socially engaged art (Helguera, 2011; Mueller, 2020) that “suspend the flow of everyday life” (Spector, 2013, p.15). At times, these works offer a respite, a re-collection, and/or valuable critiques of the communities they inhabit (Helguera, 2011). This essay invites art educators to utilize letterforms as a material of provocation and interruption. The author sketches a few brief histories of typographic interventions, offers a few provocations for art educators, and provides some examples of student work as they respond to the proposition: *Use letterforms to subvert a public space in a positive way.*

**Keywords:** typography, conceptual art, socially engaged art, installation

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Why are conversations about typography typically relegated to design classrooms? Letterforms have a storied history, intertwined with every facet of art and society. Non-representational characters marked a shift in human consciousness that opened up countless possibilities for cognitive expansion and cross-pollination. The messages carried by text are very important, but the characters themselves also warrant our attention. Type designers are artisans working in a very long tradition, and the letterforms they create are complex symbols with many layers of cultural significance. Additionally, numerous artists have utilized typography in commercial and non-commercial realms to communicate, critique, and challenge. When art educators think of text, perhaps we could think of it as material, in the same way we might think of pigment, binders, wax, clay, or cardboard. By doing so, I believe we open up exciting potentialities for art praxis.

**Typographic Disruption**

We expect to see typography in commercial settings—on billboards, aluminum cans, and pill bottles—but artists often place text in places we don’t expect to see it, or they subvert the messages we expect to read. These examples of juxtaposition and recontextualization (Gude, 2004) are hallmarks of postmodernity.

Typographic interventions can be seen everywhere, by all types of artists and non-artists. These interruptions could be framed as forms of socially engaged art (SEA) that “suspend the flow of everyday life” (Spector, 2013, p.15). At times, these works offer a respite, a re-collection, and/or valuable critiques of the communities they inhabit (Helguera, 2011). Other times they offer an esoteric puzzle, a cryptic message to decode, or a layered poem in any number of words. There are many approaches, and there are many histories that could be traced.

**Text in Conceptual Art**

Within the conceptual art movement, letterforms have been established as a common tool for social disruption. This tradition of text-based intervention is rooted in the work of Robert Smithson (1967, 1969) and Dan Graham (1966-1967) who injected their work into the pages of art magazines by co-opting the spaces typically occupied by advertisements. “The Second Investigation (Art as Idea as Idea)” by Joseph Kosuth (1968-1969) went further by purchasing spaces on billboards, marquees, and newspapers. He culled fragmented text from Roget’s *International Thesaurus* and disseminated it across the globe alongside classified ads and movie times. Nancy Spector (2013), former chief curator at the Guggenheim museum, wrote that Kosuth’s work gave pause, created surprise, flouted expectations, and offered “a new kind of public art, one that infiltrated daily life, suggesting, rather than dictating, meaning” (p.15).

A few years later, Jenny Holzer expanded the field of typographic interventions. In her “truisms” project (1977-1979), she wheat-pasted papers around Manhattan, filled with curious textual matter. Later she began using illuminated electronic displays and light projections on architectural structures to present text in the public sphere. Holzer’s work was “strategically interventionist” (Spector, 2013, p.15). Throughout her career, she has also utilized bronze plaques, stone benches, picnic tables, sarcophagi, printed pages, and LED diodes to inject texts into public spaces.

Artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Glenn Ligon, Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, Carrie Mae Weems, Richard Prince, Nancy Spero, Vik Muniz, Liam Gillick, Doug Aitken, Lawrence C. Goldsberry, C. / Typographic Interventions
Weiner; Bruce Nauman, Ugo Rondinone, and Stefan Sagmeister, along with collectives like Group Material and the Guerilla Girls, have taken up letterforms as a disruptive medium. These artists represent a variety of approaches and sympathies—and their work bleeds into the fields of design, performance, political activism, poetry, community organizing, pedagogy, environmentalism, investigative journalism, etc. Some of these artists, designers, and collaborators utilize text as a vehicle of antagonistic social action (Helguera, 2011) to open up pointed sociopolitical dialogue, while others simply lean into disruptive or poetic esoterica. Ultimately, however, these artists are united not solely by their usage of text, but by their engagement with social environs.

**Text in the Streets**

Outside of the institutionalized, frequently homogenous, mostly white art world, there are rich traditions of typographic street art. These interventions often incorporate multi-faceted textual renderings that are deeply intertwined with the communities they inhabit. These works are sometimes antagonistic social actions that express grievance and take a critical position. The strength of these types of confrontations lies in raising questions, not in providing answers (Helguera, 2011). Protest signs can also be powerful forms of text-based antagonistic action.

Problematic public monuments are another site where critical typographic interventions are commonly employed, especially in recent years in the United States. These public monuments often borrow the architectural language of Greek and Roman classicism—the material language of power and grandeur (Buffington & Waldner, 2012, p. 4)—and function as “a form of self-worship” (Browning, 2019, p. 122). Public monuments are pronouncements of power, and they often enable hegemonic forces (Gramsci in Holob, 2014) by marginalizing demographics through the oppressive regimes of white-supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchal order (hooks, 1995).

In the communities where they reside, these sites provide looming, large scale answers to questions of power: “What is it? Who controls what? How? Under what circumstances? Who lacks it? Who has it?” (Weems, 2018). They function socially to maintain barriers (Buffington & Waldner, 2012) by telling communities who is at the center and who is at the periphery.

Artists and activists have used spray paint, fabric, vinyl, mud, moss, yarn, and light projections to confront the stone, steel, and bronze of public monuments. Through these guerrilla textual interventions, activists challenge “historical amnesia” (Browning, 2019, p. 122) and encourage the community to grapple with the consensual narratives (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) that reinforce the values of dominant power structures. Even though many of these interventions are temporary, the conversations and questions they open remain salient.

**The Proposition: Use letterforms to subvert a public space in a positive way.**

I teach art at a public high school and a private university. After providing a brief survey of typographic interventions and discussing this art-making methodology, I offered this proposition to all of my students: Use typography to subvert a public space in a positive way. Create an intervention using physical letterforms.

Together we considered the following questions: How could our words meaningfully disrupt a public space and create new understandings? What words could present valuable critiques in our community (Helguera, 2011; Mueller, 2020)? How could our words or...
phrases be encouraging, motivating, or empowering? How might we invite participation and dialogue through our work (Bishop, 2012)? How could we generatively unsettle (Kumashiro, 2004; Barney, 2009, p. 90) viewers by leading them into a state of discomfort or misunderstanding?

If discomfort can be a generative pedagogical space (Bole & Zembylas, 2003), and “misunderstandings [...] can become productive sites for imagining new participatory practices and collective formations” (Alves, 2020, p. 343), how can we operationalize these conditions?

We agreed that these should be ephemeral installations that would eventually fade away or be dismantled. We challenged ourselves to use materials and/or processes that we had never used before, and materials that wouldn’t permanently alter the site. I also offered these provocations: Think of the ways Stefan Sagmeister uses fruit, fabric, coins, sticks, furniture, inflatables, skin, and hair; among other things, to create typographic messages. Think of Barbara Kruger, Liam Gillick, Lawrence Weiner, and Felix Gonzales-Torres, who use vinyl lettering in their installations. Consider Joseph Kosuth, Robert Smithson, and Dan Graham, who intervened in magazine advertisements, newspapers, and billboards. Think of Glenn Ligon and Bruce Nauman’s usage of neon light. Consider Doug Aitken and Robert Indiana’s sculptural letterforms. Remember Jenny Holzer’s usage of paper, stone, metal, LED panels, electronic billboards, and light projections.

Together in class we contemplated different phrases and their implications. We each considered a variety of public sites and their histories. We researched various typefaces, and the weight they carry. We also discussed possibilities for creating the letterforms with different materials and processes. These dynamic conversations enabled my students and I to work collaboratively as co-learners and co-makers.

As an educator I am moved by the invitation toward a more participatory conception of teaching as rendered by Davis et al., (2008). This more organic structure emphasizes improvising (Martin et al., 2006), occasioning (Davis et al., 1996), conversing (Ashton-Warner, 1963), and caring (Noddings, 1984). These frameworks encourage emergence, flexibility, contingency, and expansive possibility (Davis et al., 2008, p. 171). Our time working together on these projects reminded me that meaning is more complex when it is made collaboratively—that learning is networked, emergent, and rhizomatic—and that all parties benefit when the teacher is de-centered (Aoki, 2005).

I asked students to document their work with photographs or video, and I gave them about two weeks to implement their physical interventions. While they were working outside of class, we spent some of our in-class time exploring a second iteration of the prompt: If you had unlimited funding and access, how would you push this project further? Use Photoshop to create a mockup of a typographic intervention you would like to see.

**Student Work**

The following images provide a small sampling of student work. All documentation is provided by the students themselves. I have also included a few brief samples of student writing about their projects.
Samantha Peterson & Sophia McCandless (high school students), “WE CAN STILL FIX THIS”. Spray paint on a soon-to-be demolished brick wall.

“We wanted a message that was hopeful, even though so much is going wrong. There is a lot to worry about right now. But ultimately, we still believe that these problems are fixable—even major systemic issues like racism, sexism, homophobia, or global warming. We just have to listen to each other and work together. We made a large stencil and spray painted the letters on an old brick wall that will be torn down soon. We hope these words will encourage people to consider how they can take action in their own ways.” S.P. & S.M.
Eveline Zarate (high school student), “LAND OF THE FREE”.

Light projected on a County Courthouse.

“I knew mass incarceration was a problem in the United States, but it wasn’t until 2018 that the problem affected my family. My uncle and my dad were incarcerated on two separate occasions. I mourn with the people in prison who haven’t gotten the justice they deserve. The U.S. makes up about 5% of the global population yet almost 25% of the world’s incarcerated population. People of Color are disproportionately imprisoned. Systematic racism is right in front of our eyes, and yet many people still choose to ignore it. It’s no question that I find this phrase ironic. I projected this text onto the Justice Building in my hometown, early in the morning.” E.Z.
Estrella Chinchay (high school student), “THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE HERE TOO”. Vinyl lettering in a parking garage.

“‘It’s easy to dehumanize each other. It’s easy to turn away from problems that don’t affect us directly. I installed this vinyl lettering in a parking garage near my house, and I’m sure people will interpret it in a variety of ways. I hope it will encourage people to take care of each other with radical kindness and empathy. The goal was to remind people that we are not alone on this planet and our actions impact other lives. We are all human beings and should be treated as such. This project opened so many doors for me. I realized how much I love public intervention and sharing my voice. I loved the motivation of creating art for not just a moment, but a movement.’ E.C.
“I wanted to explore relativism in this world of misinformation and fake news. Something special or sacred that rings deeply true to one person might be utter nonsense to someone else. I decided to play with perceptions in this typographic intervention. I stumbled onto the work of Austrian artist/designer Stefan Sagmeister, who has explored similar questions in his work. I created this installation using long strips of white fabric and a staple gun. The fabric was stretched in between trees to spell the word ‘Truth’ when viewed from a certain angle. As the viewer moves to the left or right, the text becomes increasingly scrambled and unintelligible. I’m coming to realize in my life that it’s impossible to find truth without changing my position.” C.P.

Cole Phillippi (high school student), “TRUTH”. Fabric stretched between trees, seen from 3 angles.

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Samuel Crane (high school student), *Keep Trying*. Lego letterforms on a playground.
Julia Stark (undergraduate student), *I want tenderness…*
Vinyl lettering on an abandoned building.

Deanna Nielson (undergraduate student), *Hold Fashion Accountable*
Clothing on a sidewalk outside of a shopping center.
Josie Glover (undergraduate student),
When you see this text me
Vinyl lettering at a bus stop.

Jadyn Baria (high school student), bend. Foliage on bedsheets.
Sophie Twitchell (undergraduate student), Bye. Floral arrangement.

Madi Guthrie (undergraduate student), Purpose. Toothpicks and fishing line.
Jayde Jones (high school student),
We need to get more comfortable with being uncomfortable.
Vinyl lettering on her back windshield.

Andrew Hansen (high school student),
Relief.
Ceramic dinnerware, with instructions for the viewer to throw rocks at the plates and vessels until they’re broken.
Hannah Landeen (undergraduate student), *Funeral Liturgy*. Digital mockup.
Megan Martin (undergraduate student), *FIGHT APATHY*. Digital mockup.

Estrella Chinchay (high school student), *Billboard #444*. Digital mockup.
Conclusions

The students created work that was surprising and innovative, and they pushed themselves into new terrain. Many of the students waited and watched as onlookers absorbed their work. A few students engaged strangers in conversation. In each case, the physical interventions raised questions (Helguera, 2011) and opened occasions for dialogue. Students produced spaces and situations that upended expectations in ‘fun, strange, and liberating’ ways (Thompson, 2016, p. 446)—and in some cases they attempted to activate these new perspectives by offering ‘alternative, hopeful futures’ (Brom, 2020, p. 347).

As Nancy Spector (2013) observes, these kinds of interventions are premised on the element of surprise. They catch you off guard, invade your space, and, in the process, offer an alternate reality. These ‘microinterruptions in the streams of our consciousness can generate a meaningful impact’ (p. 15).

In my personal practice as an art educator, this project reinforced Jorge Lucero’s (2020) observation that “teaching is truly a social practice that comes with ready needs, ready politics and power dynamics, ready diversity and communities, ready desire for change and discovery, [and] ready social engagement” (p. 52).

Our actions were small and local, but they responded to large forces at play in our individual spheres. They co-opted unexpected sites and made them into adaptable spaces (Savage, 2006). These projects explored the intersections of art, pedagogy, history, and politics (Fisher, 2017) in our community, and the conversations they initiated will linger long after the interventions fade away.

Outside of the institutionalized, frequently homogenous, mostly white art world, there are rich traditions of typographic street art. These interventions often incorporate multi-faceted textual renderings that are deeply intertwined with the communities they inhabit. These works are sometimes antagonistic social actions that express grievance and take a critical position.

The strength of these types of confrontations lies in raising questions, not in providing answers (Helguera, 2011). Protest signs can also be powerful forms of text-based antagonistic action.
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Abrams.

